Imperfect Girl

1

Story by NISIOISIN
Retold by Mitsuru Hattori

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NISIOISIN

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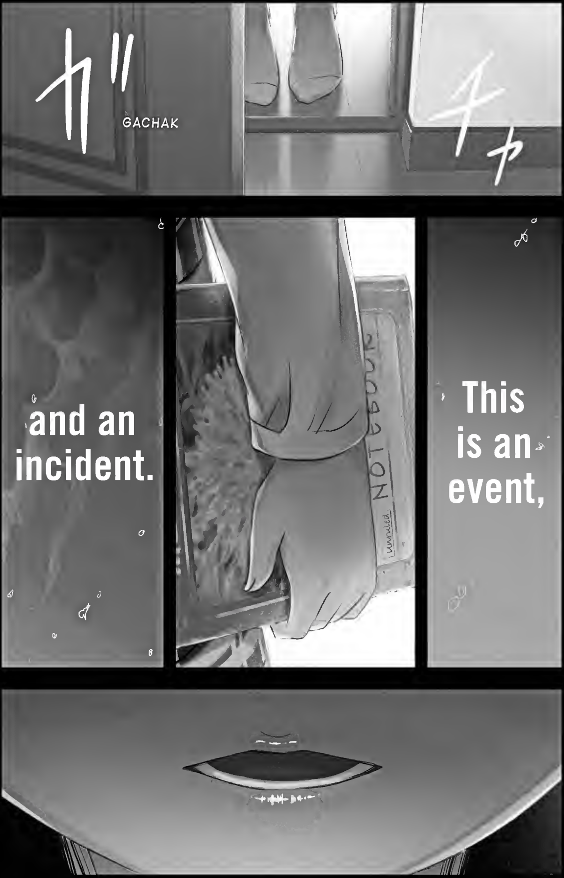
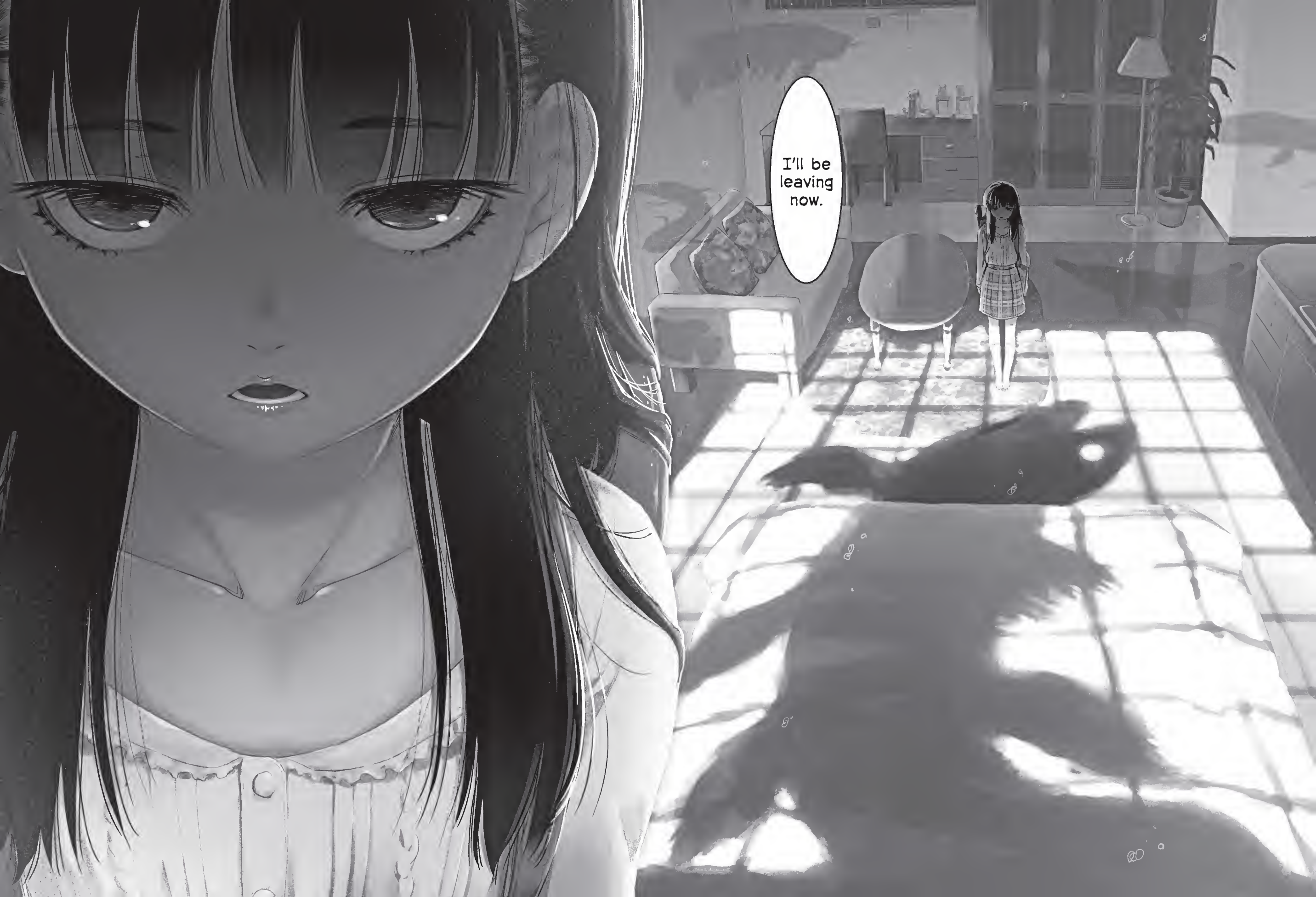
Original Character Concept:
Foo Midori

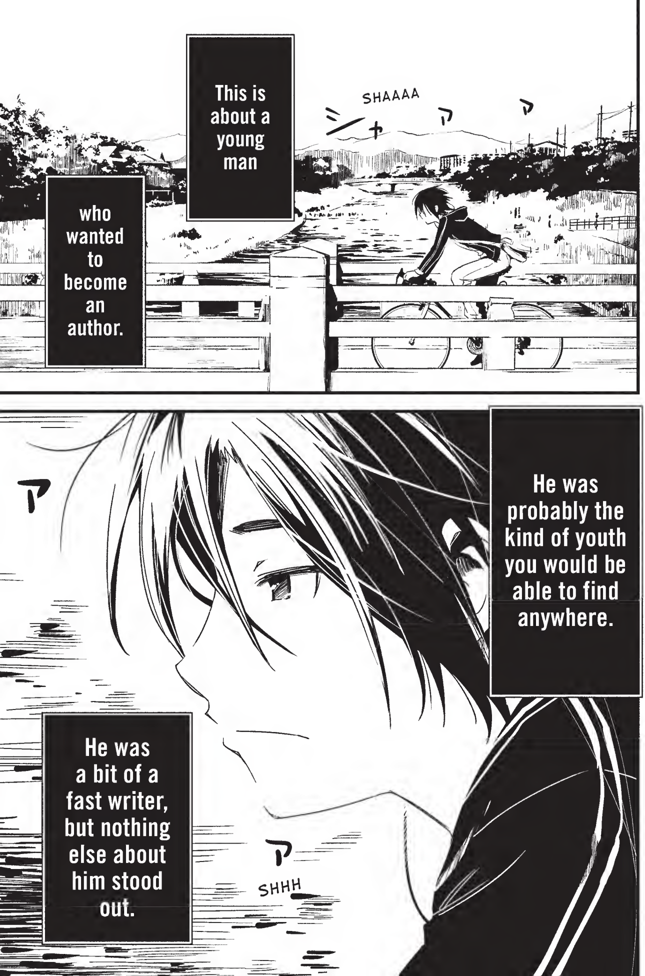
1

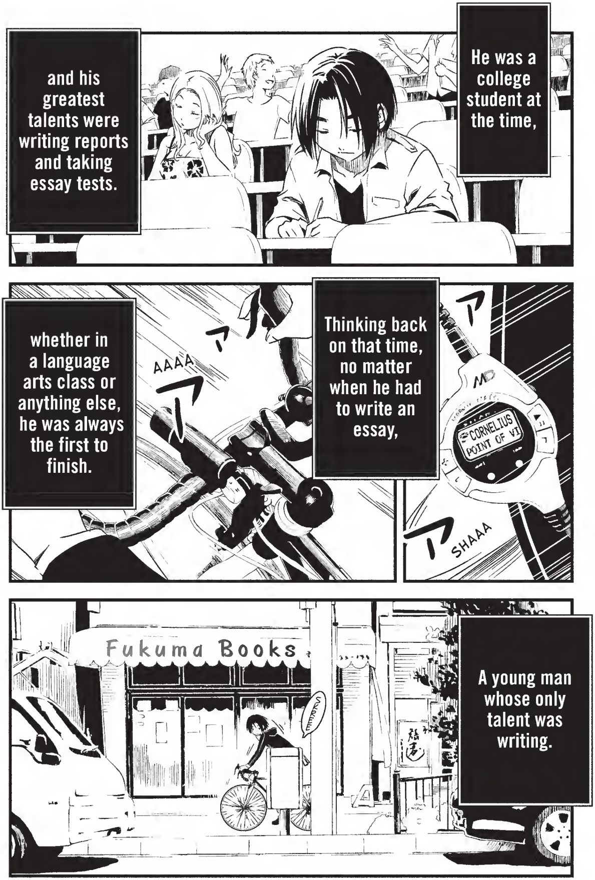
This is not a tale.

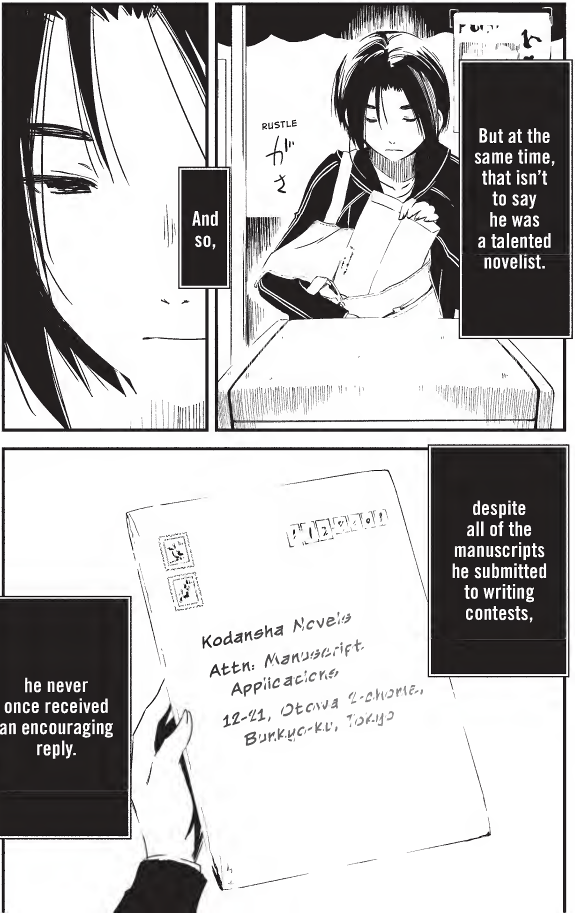

ガ
チャ
GACHAK
This is an event,
NOTEBOOK
Unruled
and an incident.

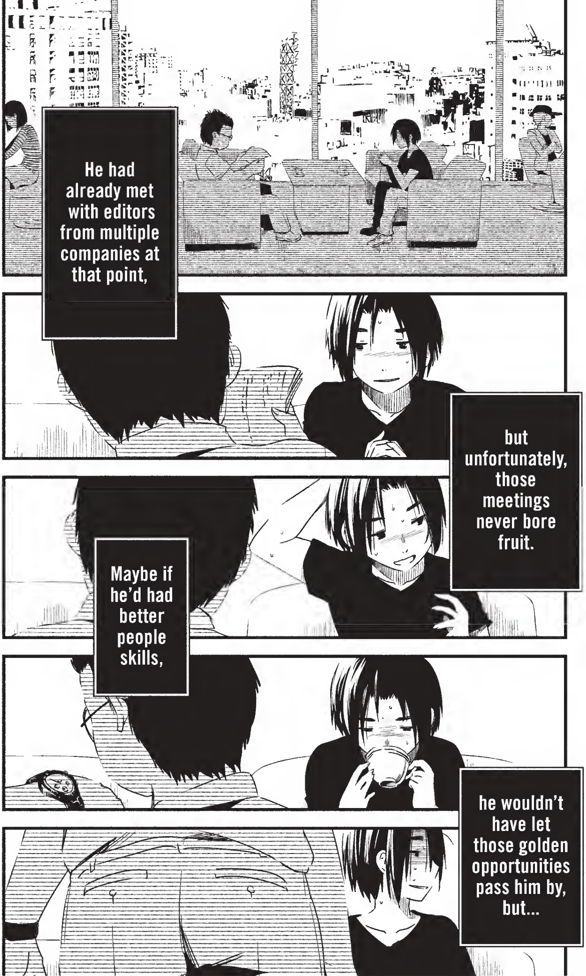

I'll be leaving now.

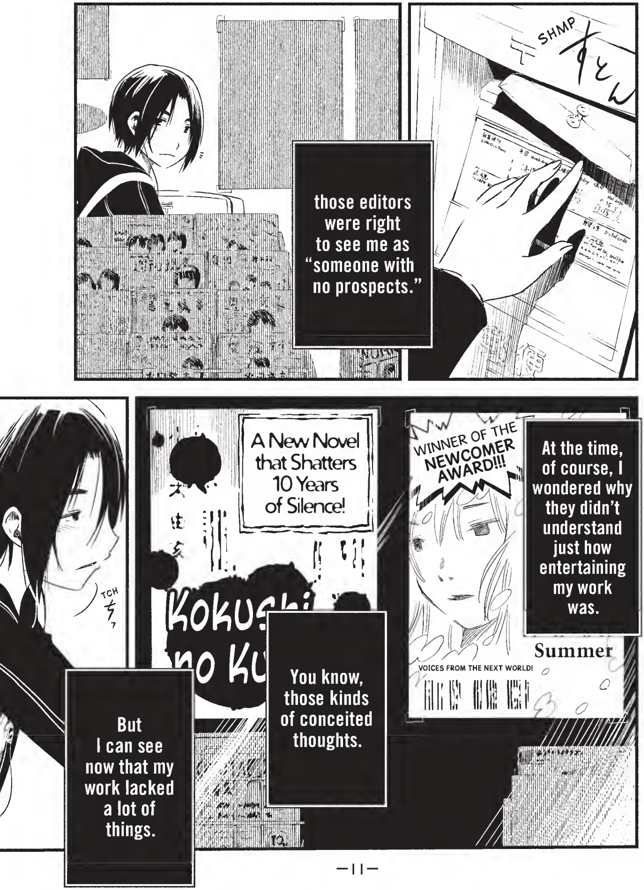
1

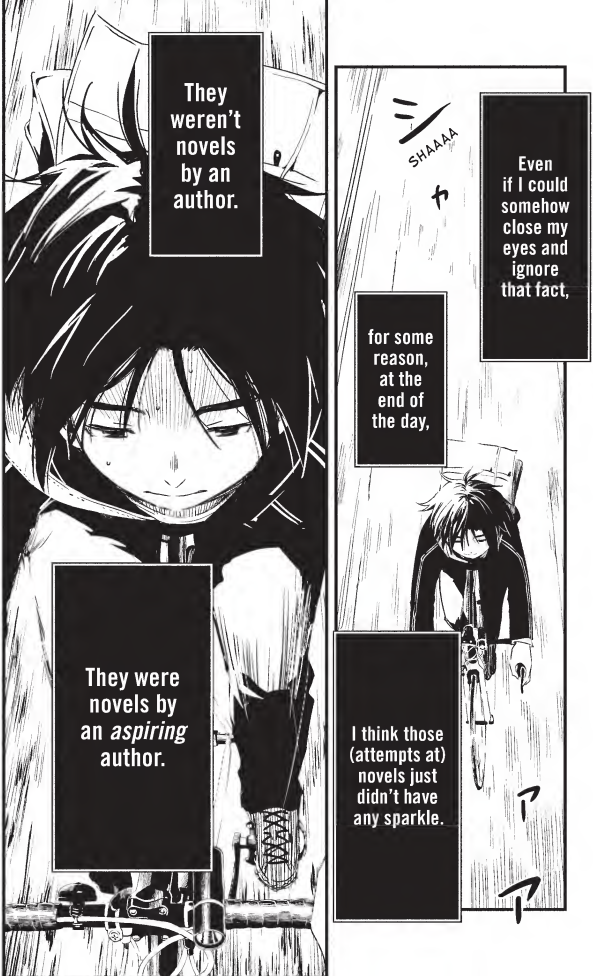

This is about a young man
who wanted to become an author.
シャ
ア
ア
SHAAAA
He was probably the kind of youth you would be able to find anywhere.
ア
ア
SHHH
He was a bit of a fast writer, but nothing else about him stood out.

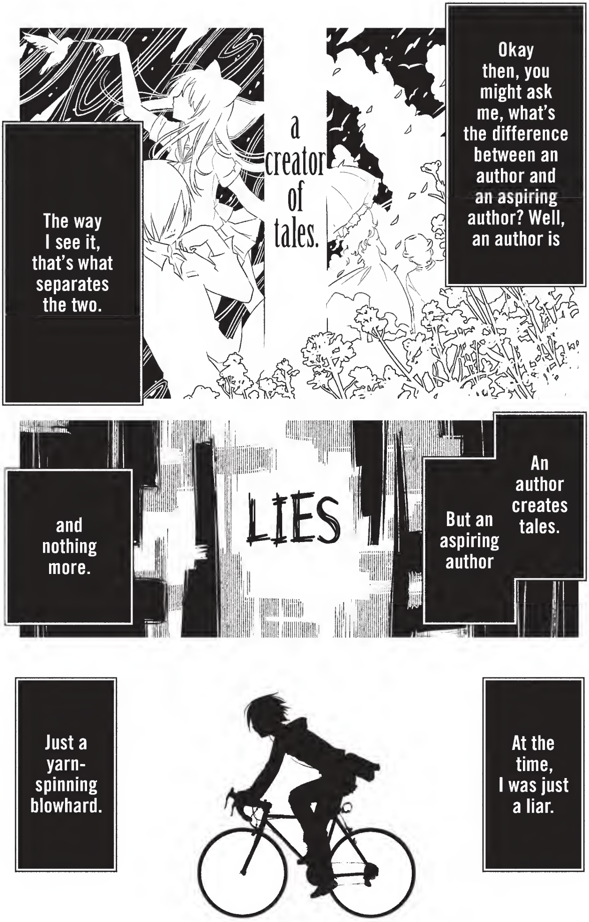

He was a college student at the time,
and his greatest talents were writing reports and taking essay tests.
ア SHAAA
MD
CORNELIUS POINT OF VI
Thinking back on that time, no matter when he had to write an essay,
ア AAAA
whether in a language arts class or anything else, he was always the first to finish.
A young man whose only talent was writing.
SKREE
Fukuma Books

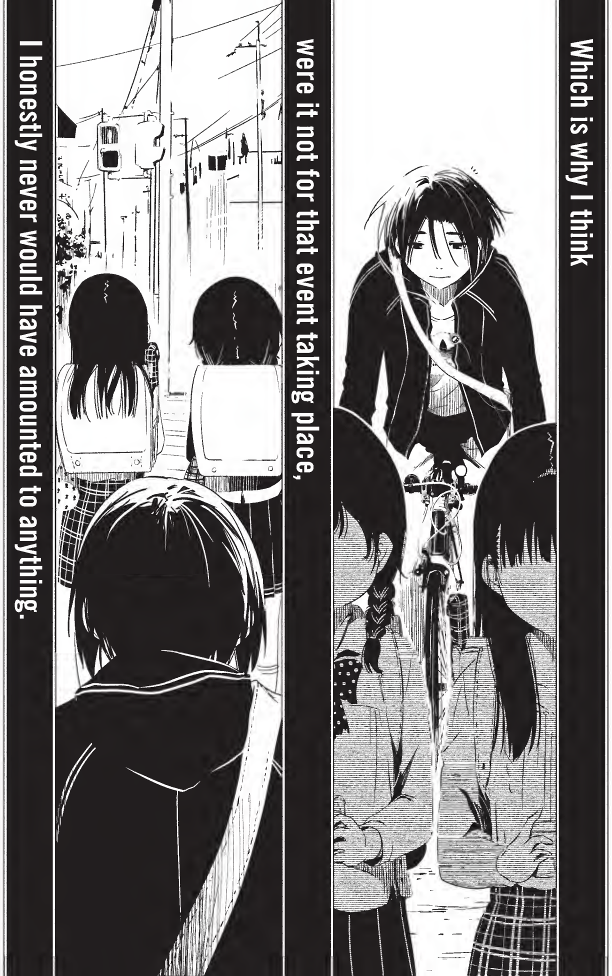

But at the same time, that isn't to say he was a talented novelist.
RUSTLE
がさ
And so,
despite all of the manuscripts he submitted to writing contests,
Kodansha Novels
Attn: Manuscript Applications
12-21, Otowa 2-chome, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo
he never once received an encouraging reply.

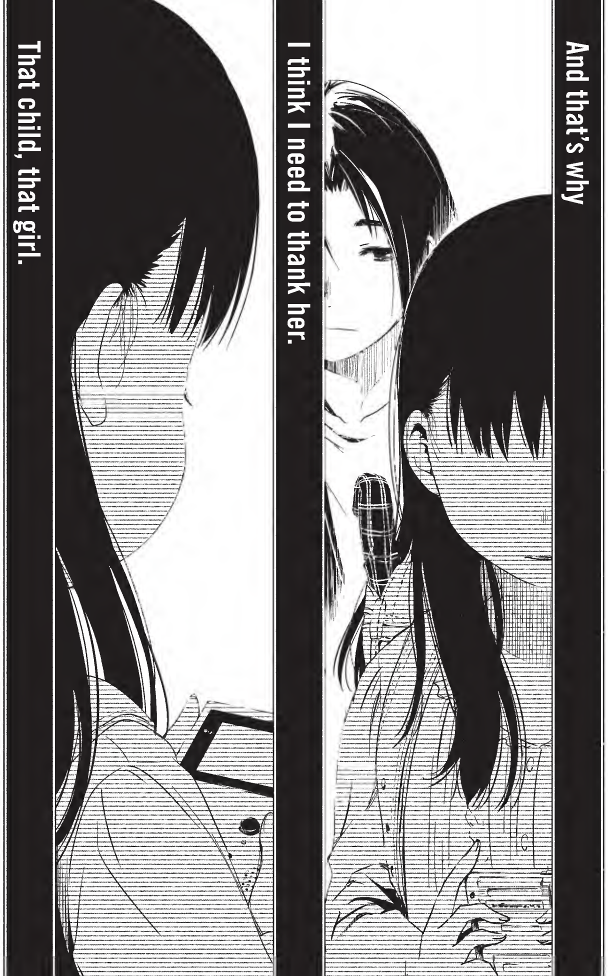

He had already met with editors from multiple companies at that point,
but unfortunately, those meetings never bore fruit.
Maybe if he'd had better people skills,
he wouldn't have let those golden opportunities pass him by, but...

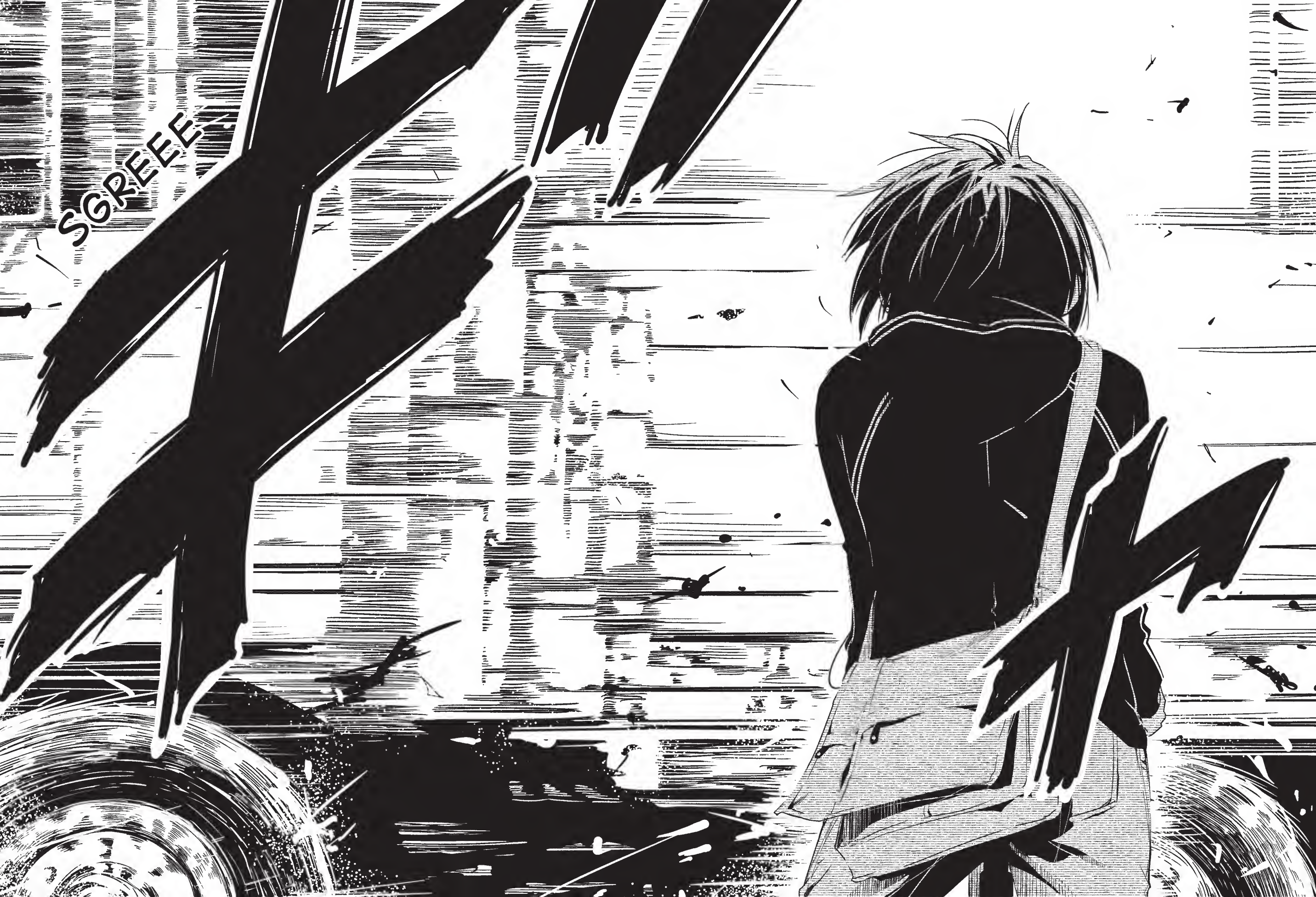

SHMP
すとん
those editors were right to see me as "someone with no prospects."
At the time, of course, I wondered why they didn't understand just how entertaining my work was.
WINNER OF THE NEWCOMER AWARD!!!
Summer
VOICES FROM THE NEXT WORLD!
A New Novel that Shatters 10 Years of Silence!
Kokushi no Ku
You know, those kinds of conceited thoughts.
TCH
ちっ
But I can see now that my work lacked a lot of things.

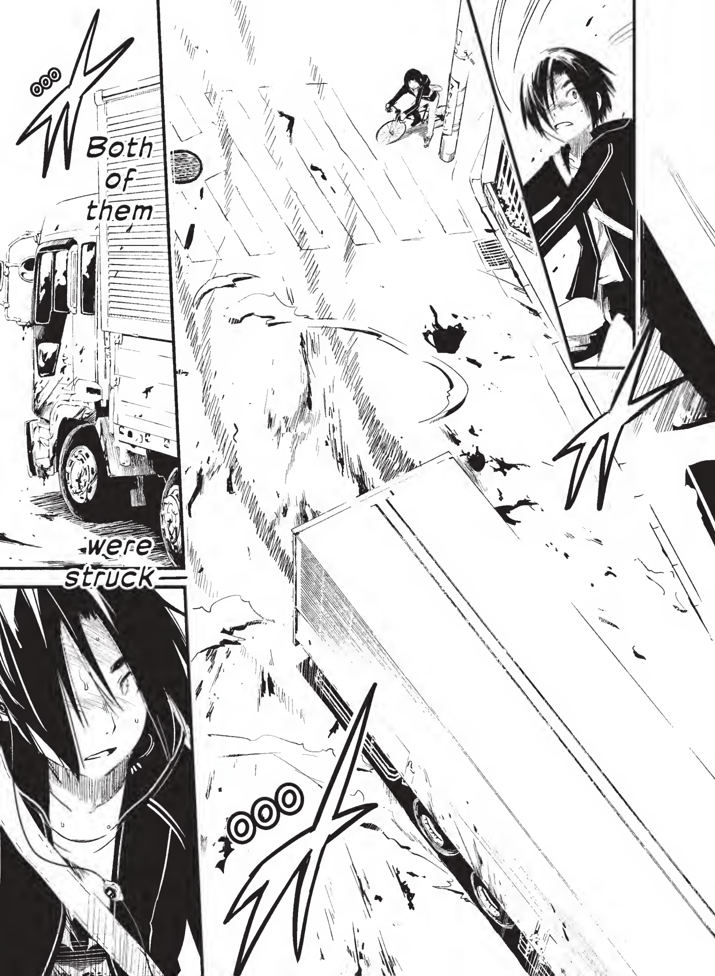

They weren't novels by an author.
They were novels by an *aspiring* author.
Even if I could somehow close my eyes and ignore that fact,
for some reason, at the end of the day,
I think those (attempts at) novels just didn't have any sparkle.
シャ
SHAAAA
アア

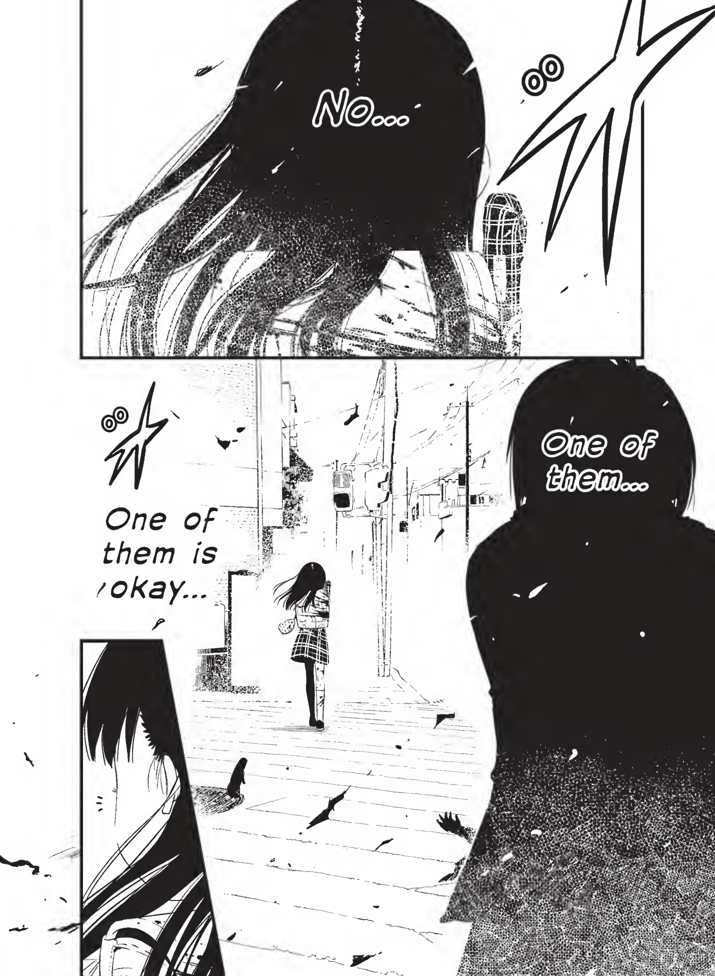

Okay then, you might ask me, what's the difference between an author and an aspiring author? Well, an author is
a creator of tales.
The way I see it, that's what separates the two.
An author creates tales.
But an aspiring author
LIES
and nothing more.
At the time, I was just a liar.
Just a yarn-spinning blowhard.

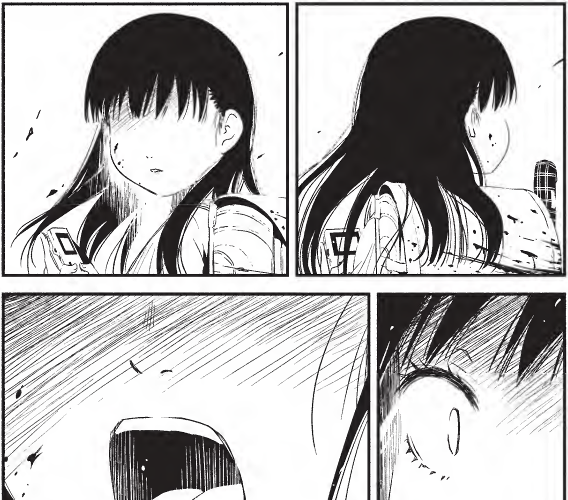

Which is why I think
were it not for that event taking place,
I honestly never would have amounted to anything.

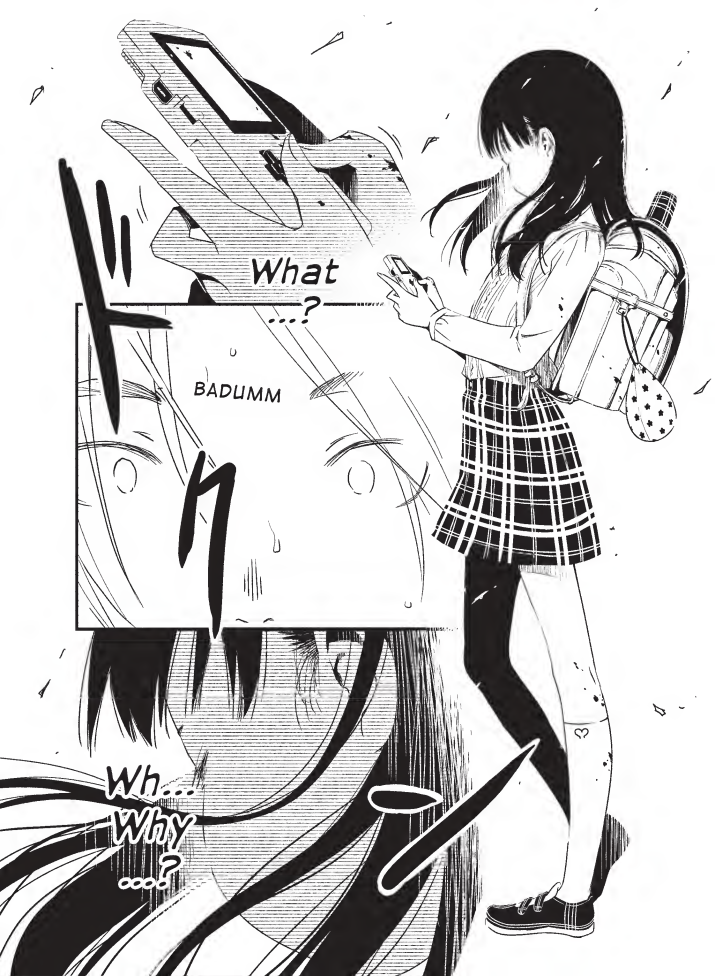

And that's why
I think I need to thank her.
That child, that girl.

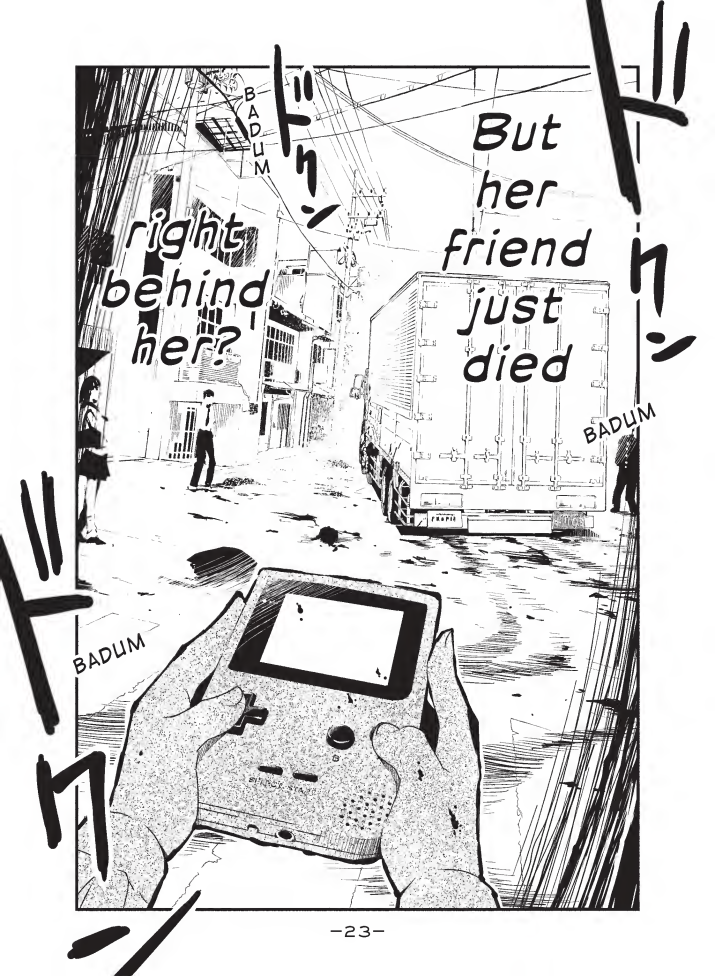

SGREEE

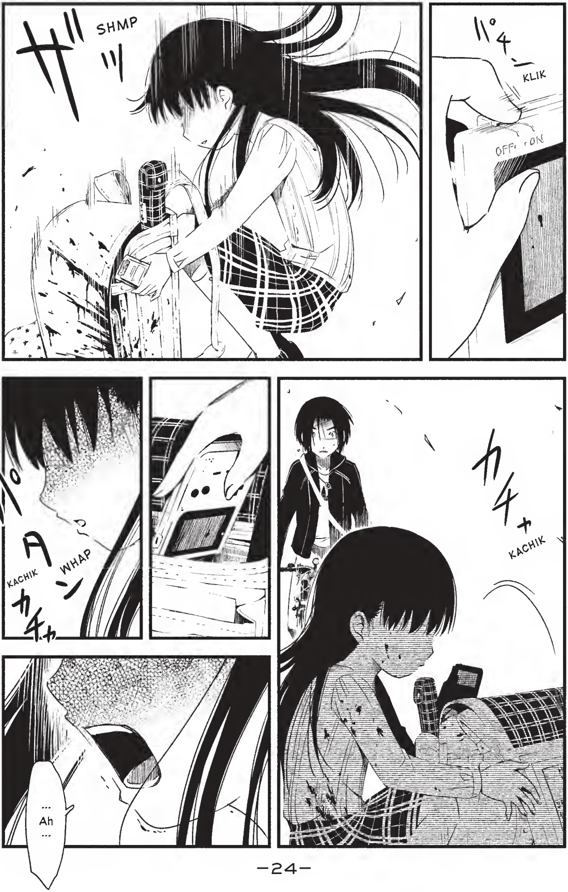

ooo
Both of them were struck—
OOO

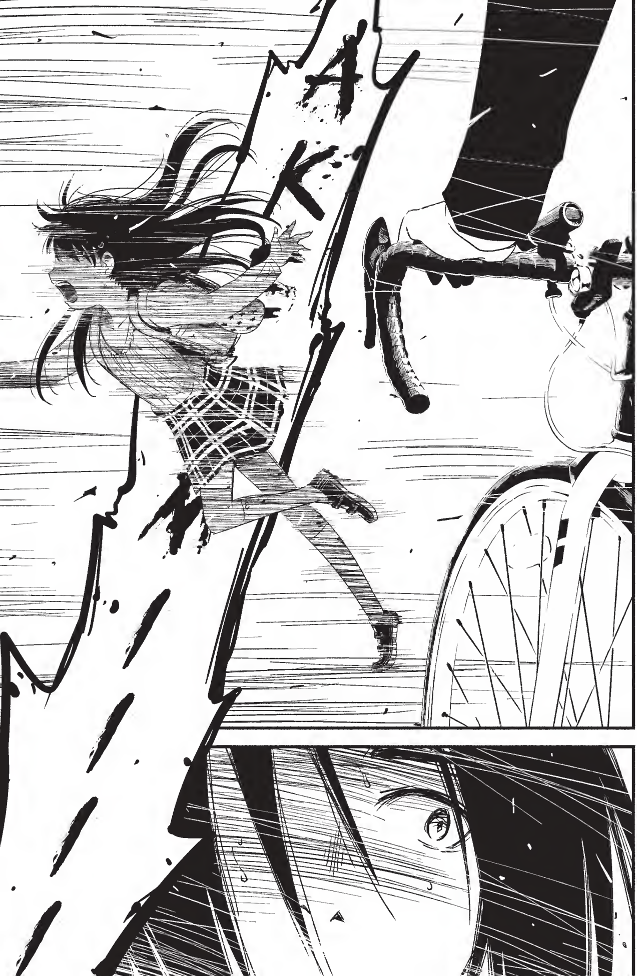

No...
One of them...
One of them is okay...

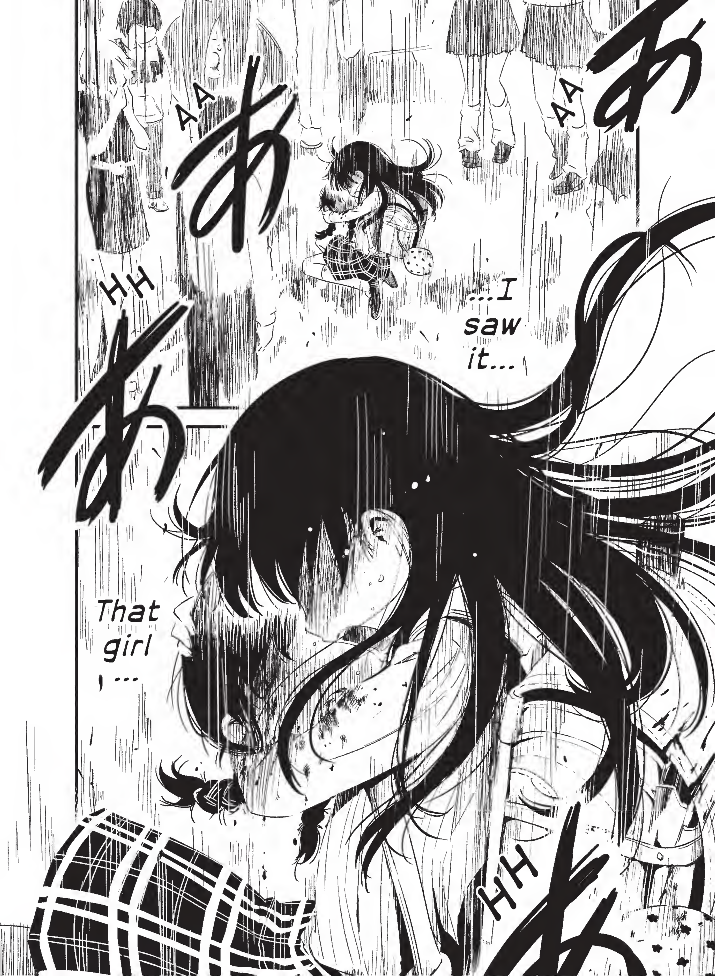


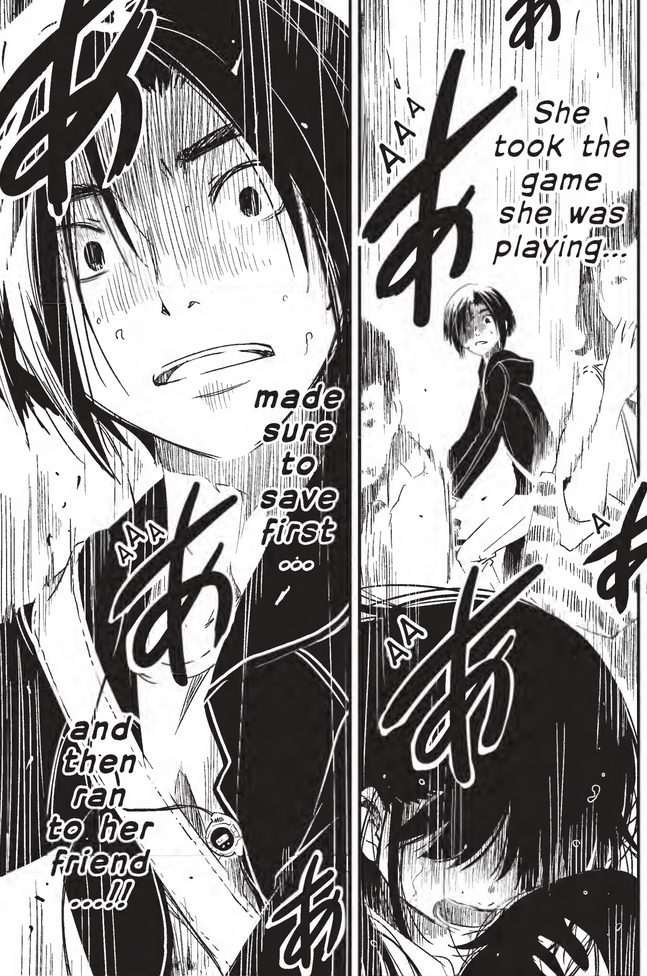

What ...?
ドクン
BADUMM
Wh... Why ...?

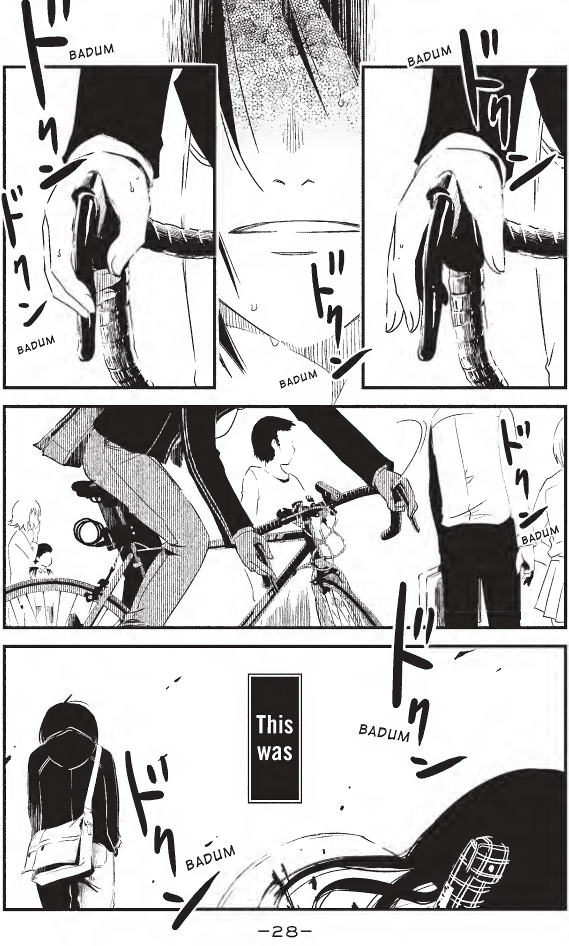

ドクン
But her friend just died
BADUM
ドクン
BADUM
right behind her?
ドクン
BADUM

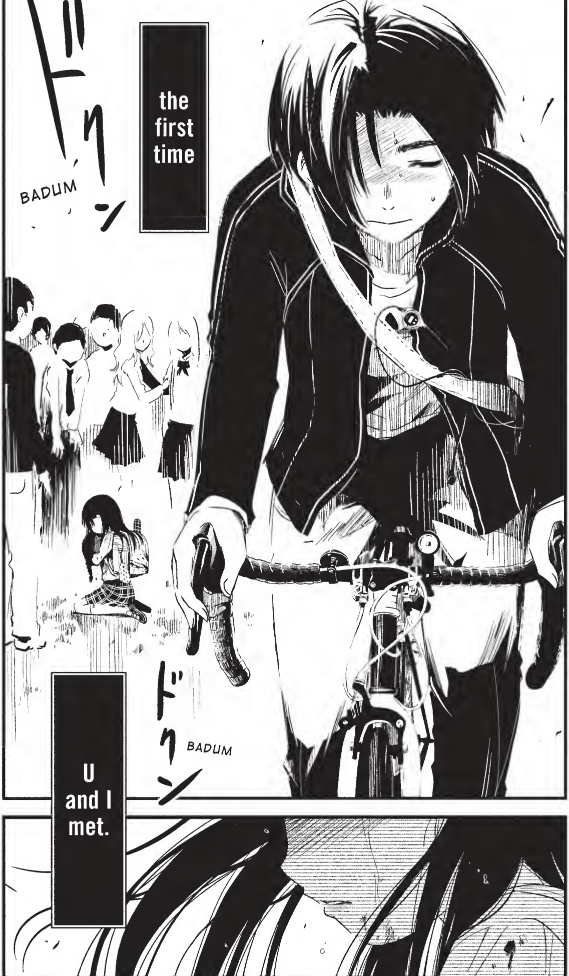

パチン
KLIK
OFF ON
ザッ
SHMP
カチャ
KACHIK
パタン
WHAP
カチャ
KACHIK
... Ah ...

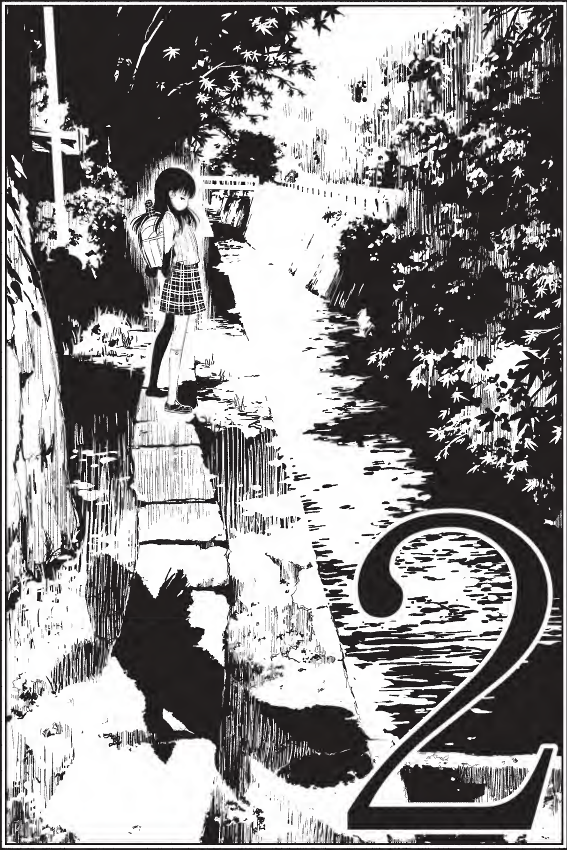

AK

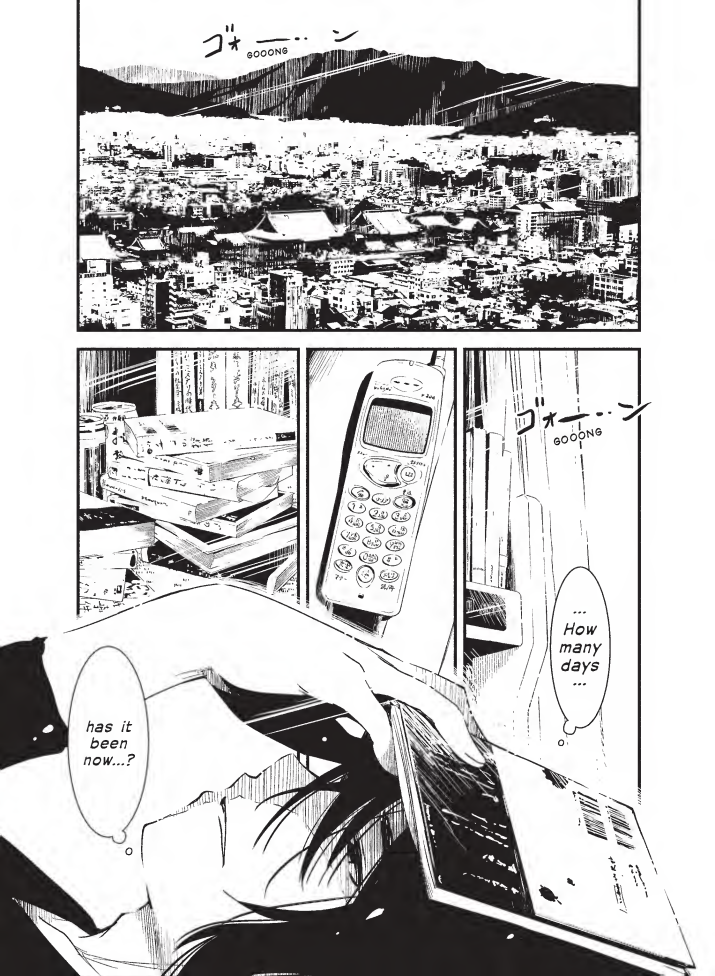

あ
AA
あ
AA
HH
あ
...I saw it...
That girl ...
HH
あ

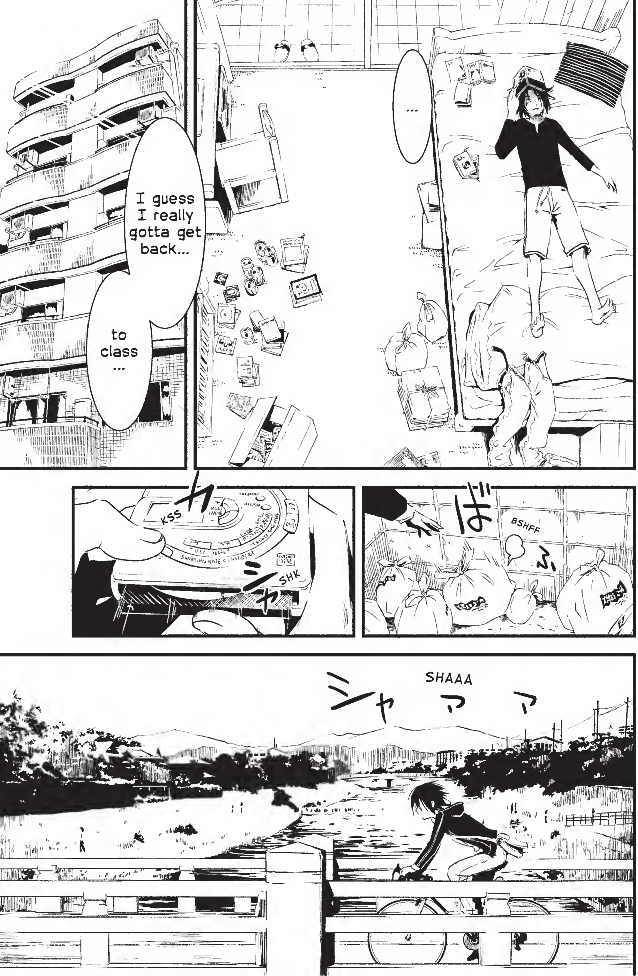

あ
AAA あ
She took the game she was playing...
A あ
AA あ
あ
made sure to save first...
AAA あ
and then ran to her friend...!!
あ

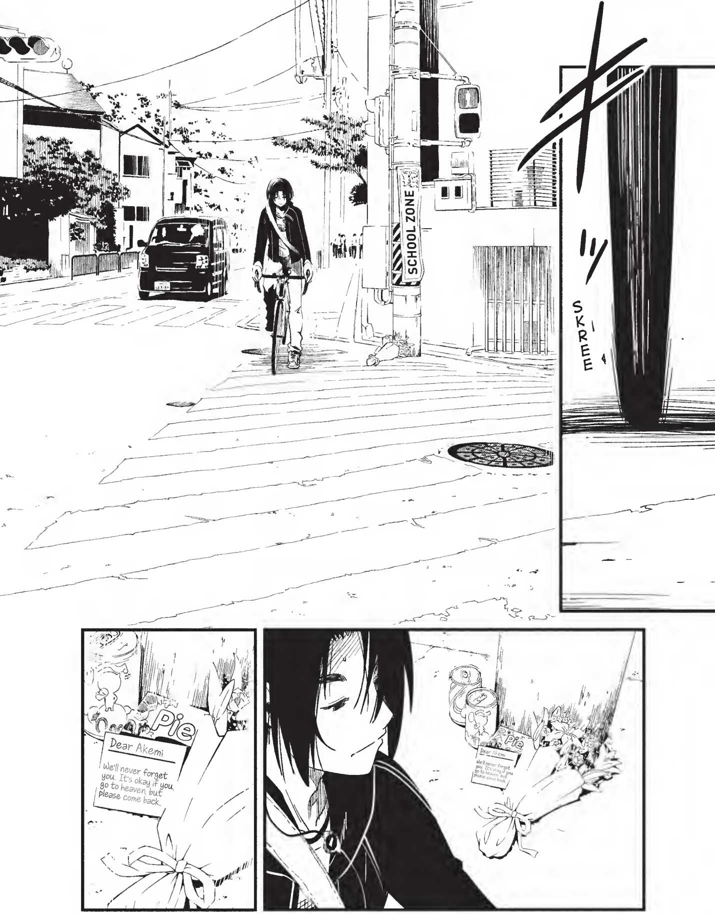

ドクン
BADUM
ドクン
BADUM
ドクン
BADUM
ドクン
BADUM
ドクン
BADUM
ドクン
BADUM
This was
ドクン
BADUM
ドクン
BADUM

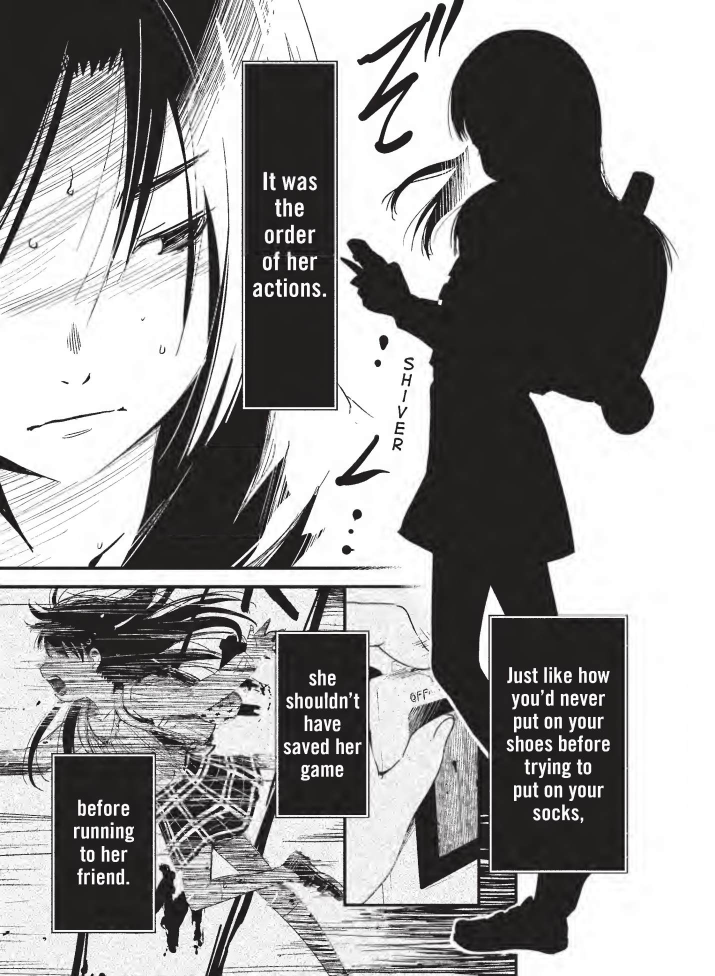

the first time
ドクン
BADUM
ドクン
BADUM
U and I met.

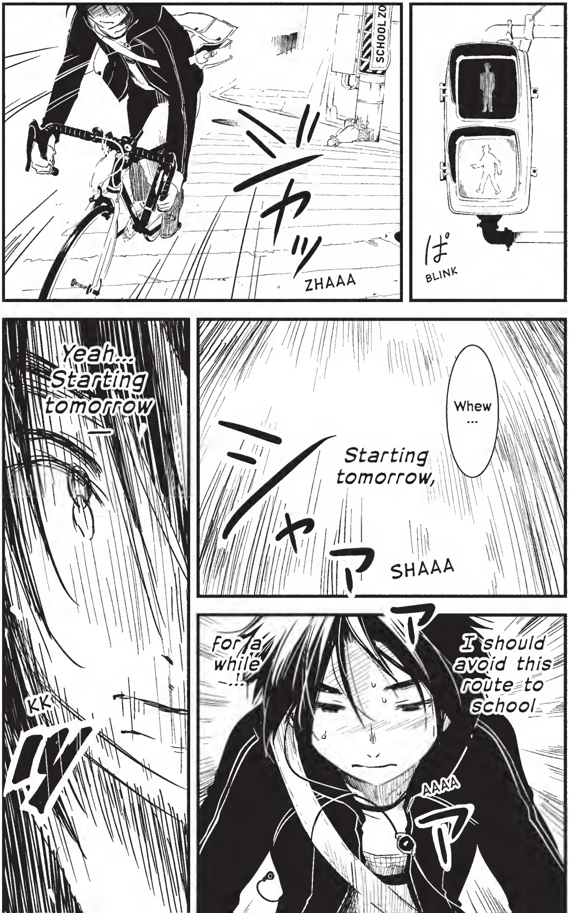

2

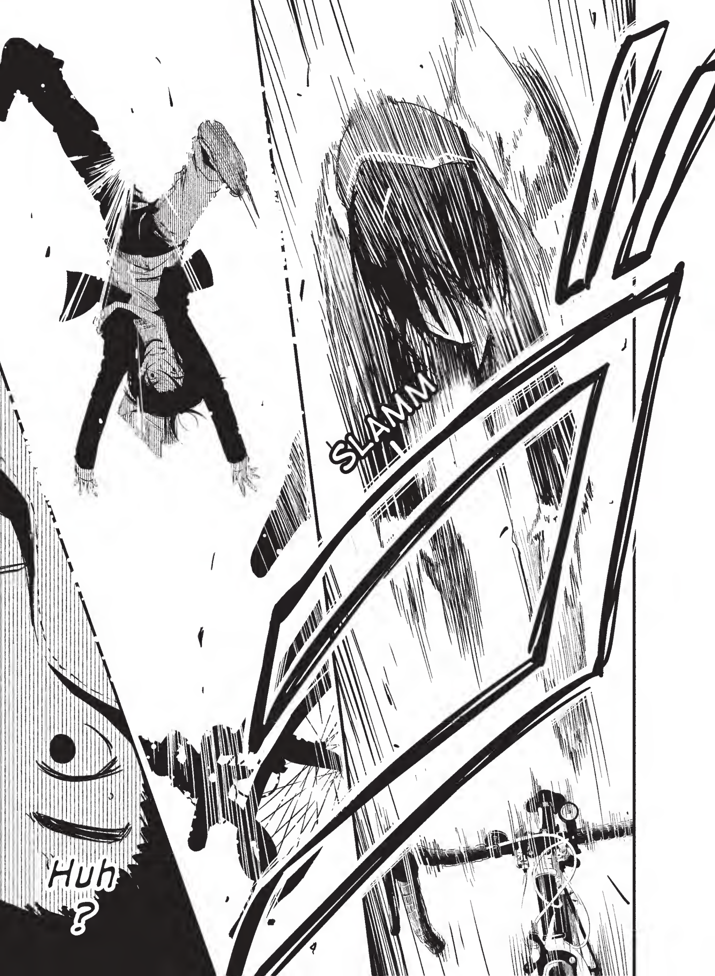

ゴォー・・ン
GOOONG
ゴォー・・ン
GOOONG
... How many days ...
has it been now...?

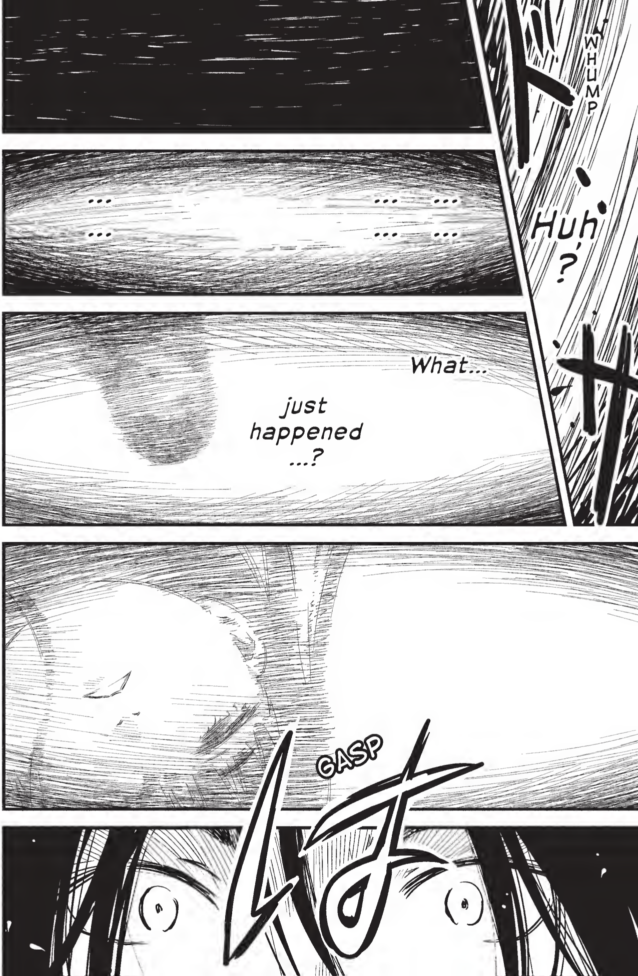

...
I guess I really gotta get back...
to class ...
ば
BSHFF
ふ
カ
KSS
シャ
SHK
SHAAA
シャアア

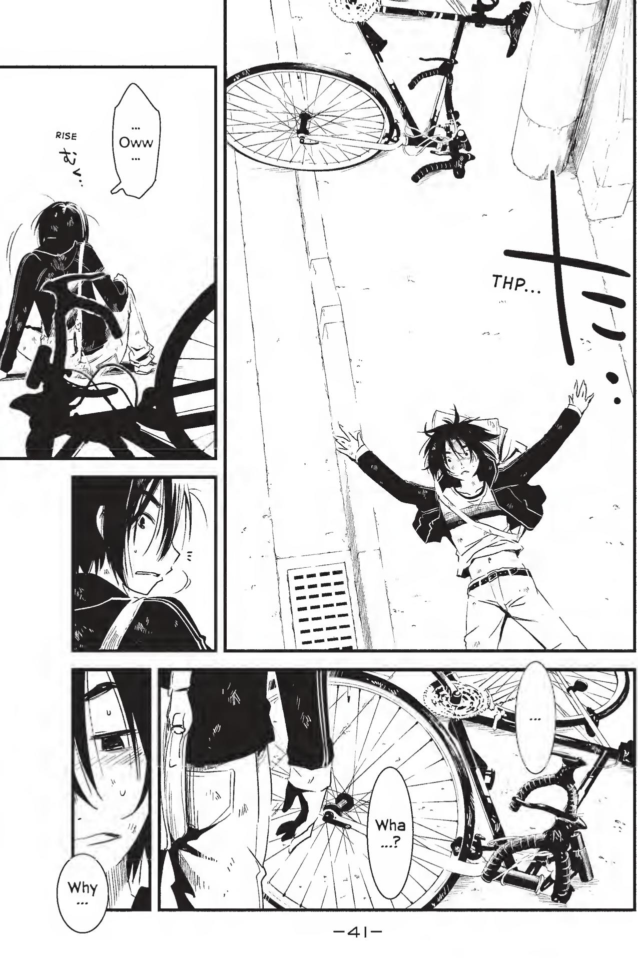

キッ
SKREE
SCHOOL ZONE
Pie
Dear Akemi
We'll never forget you. It's okay if you go to heaven, but please come back.
Pie
Dear Akemi
We'll never forget you. It's okay if you go to heaven, but please come back.

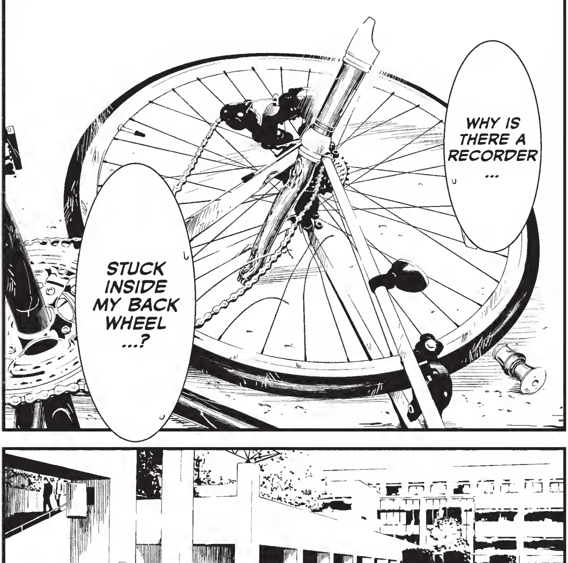

It was the order of her actions.
SHIVER
Just like how you'd never put on your shoes before trying to put on your socks,
OFF
she shouldn't have saved her game
before running to her friend.

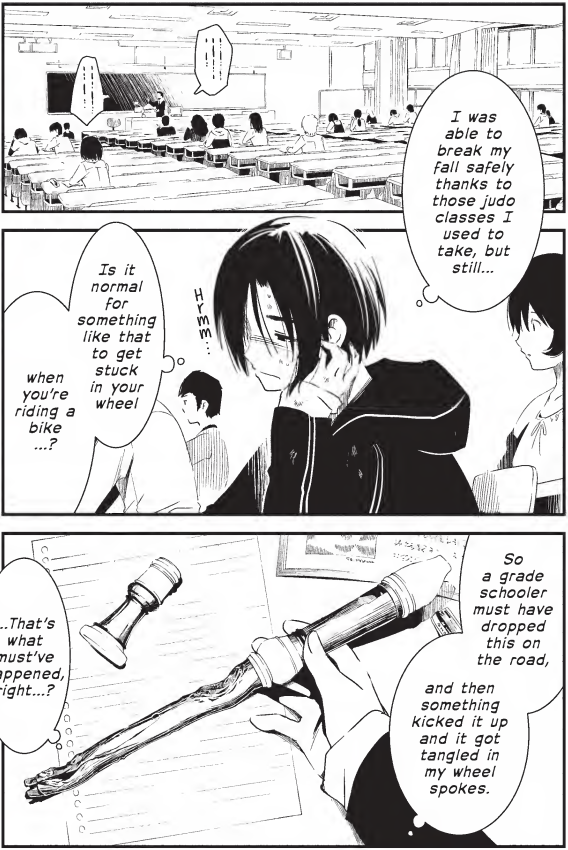

ぱ
BLINK
SCHOOL ZO
ジャッ
ZHAAA
Whew…
Starting tomorrow,
シャア
SHAAA
I should avoid this route to school
for a while…
アア
AAAA
Yeah… Starting tomorrow—
KK
ッ

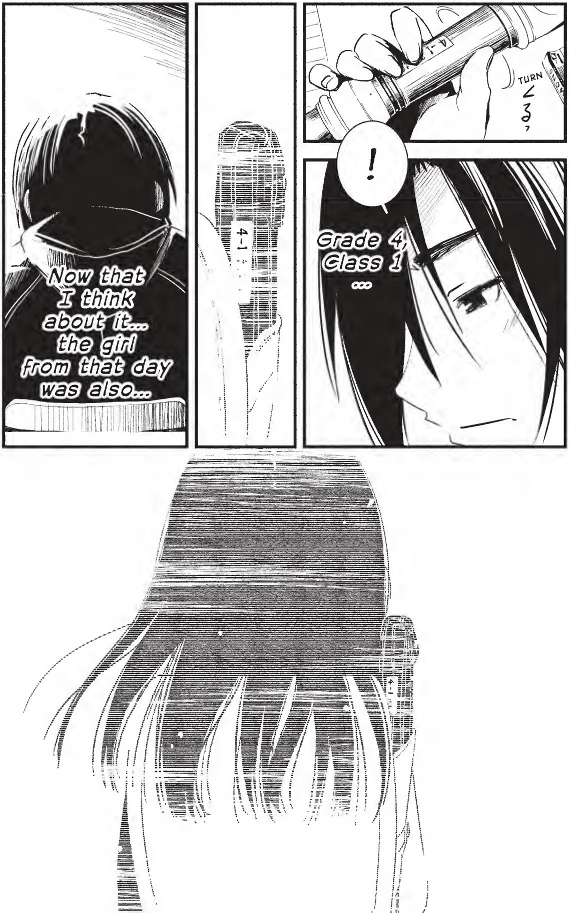

SLAMM
Huh?

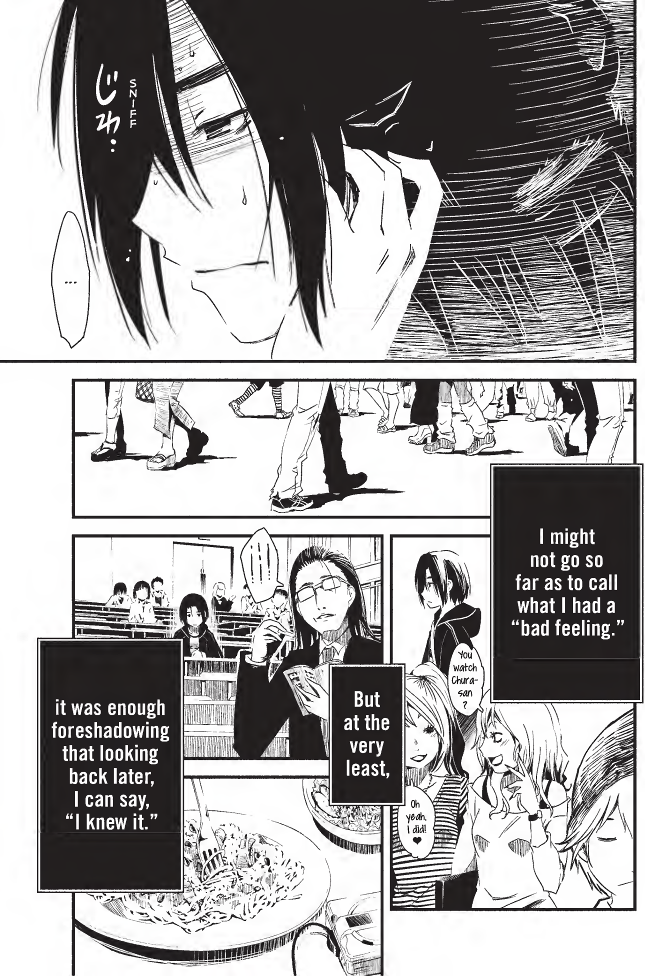

WHUMP
Huh?
... ...
... ...
What...
just happened...?
GASP

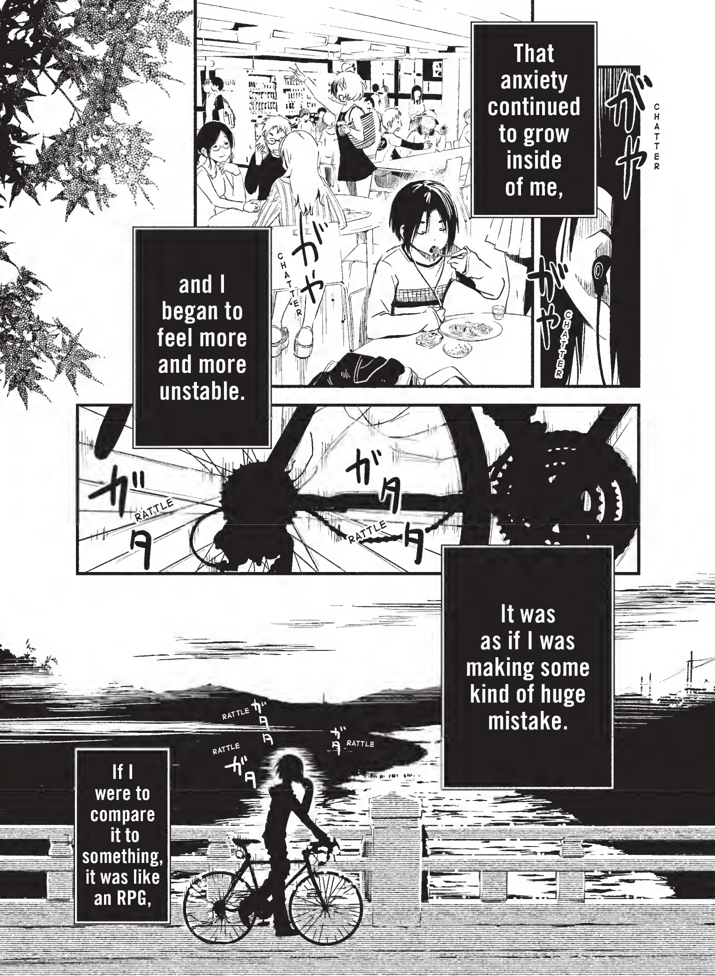

THP...
た..
RISE
むく..
... Oww ...
...
Wha ...?
Why ...

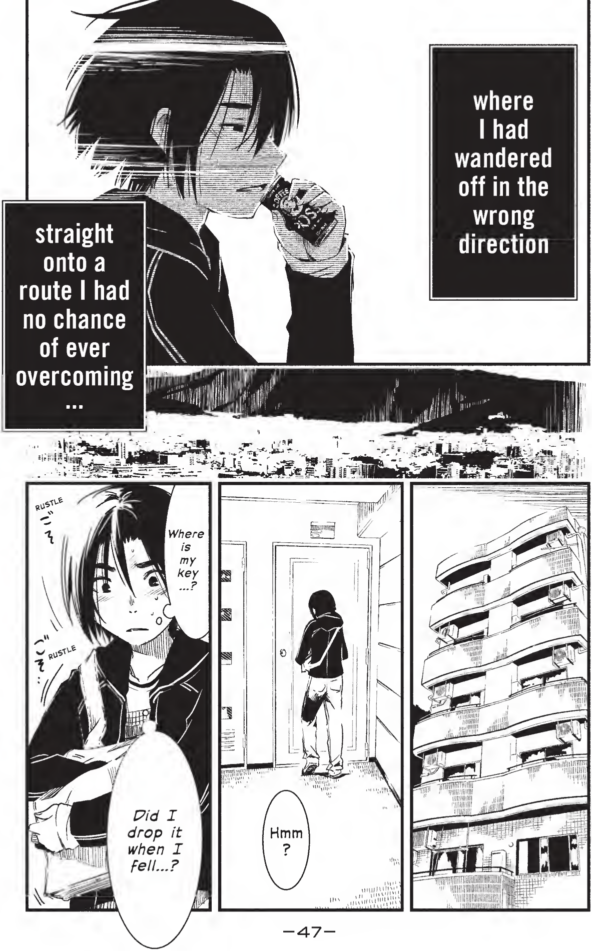

WHY IS THERE A RECORDER ...
STUCK INSIDE MY BACK WHEEL ...?
Culture Fest! Come On By!
PICTURE BOOK EXHIBIT

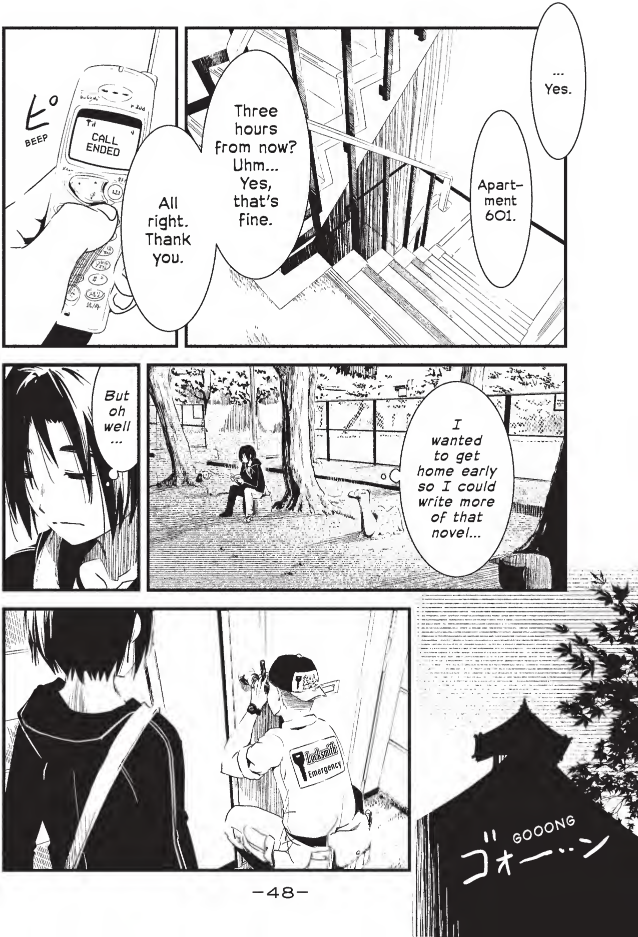

...!!
...!!
I was able to break my fall safely thanks to those judo classes I used to take, but still...
Hrmm..
Is it normal for something like that to get stuck in your wheel
when you're riding a bike ...?
So a grade schooler must have dropped this on the road,
and then something kicked it up and it got tangled in my wheel spokes.
...That's what must've happened, right...?

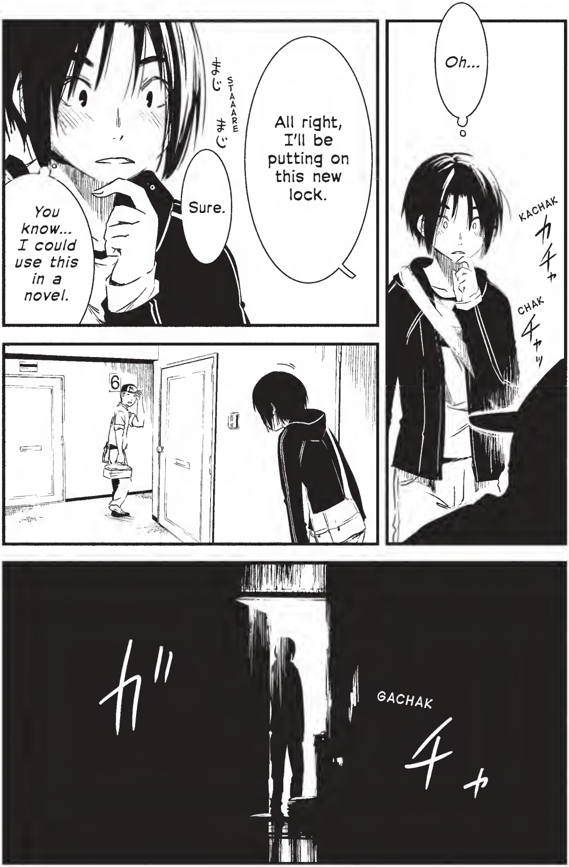

4-1
TURN
くる
!
Grade 4, Class 1 ...
4-1
Now that I think about it... the girl from that day was also...
4-1

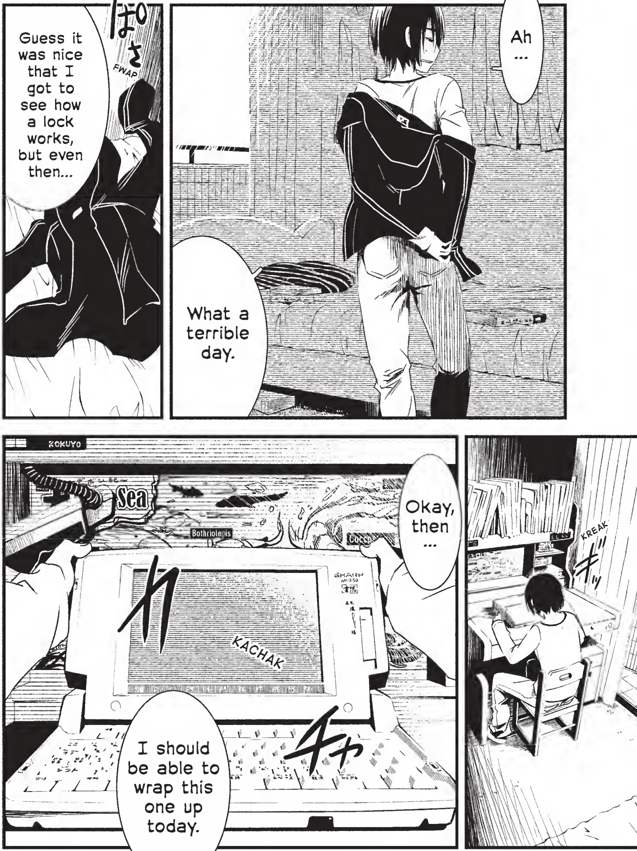

じわ…
SNIFF
…
I might not go so far as to call what I had a "bad feeling."
You watch Chura-san?
Oh yeah, I did! ❤
But at the very least,
!!
it was enough foreshadowing that looking back later, I can say, "I knew it."

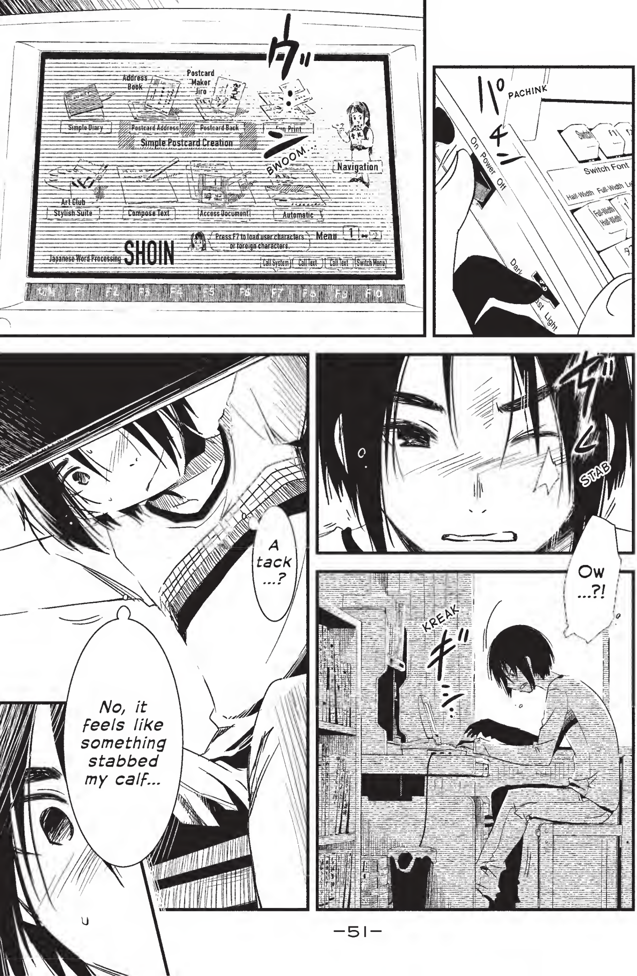

ガヤ
CHATTER
That anxiety continued to grow inside of me,
ガヤ
CHATTER
ガヤ
CHATTER
and I began to feel more and more unstable.
ガタ
RATTLE
ガタ
RATTLE
It was as if I was making some kind of huge mistake.
ガタタ
RATTLE
ガタ
RATTLE
ガタ
RATTLE
If I were to compare it to something, it was like an RPG,

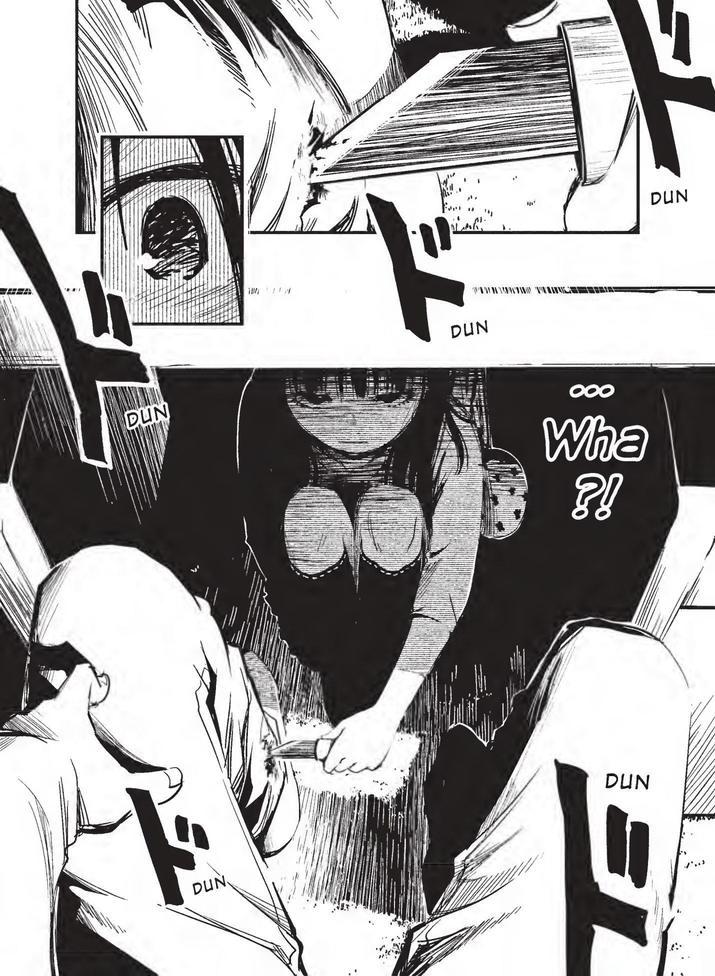

where I had wandered off in the wrong direction
straight onto a route I had no chance of ever overcoming ...
Hmm?
Where is my key...?
RUSTLE
RUSTLE
Did I drop it when I fell...?

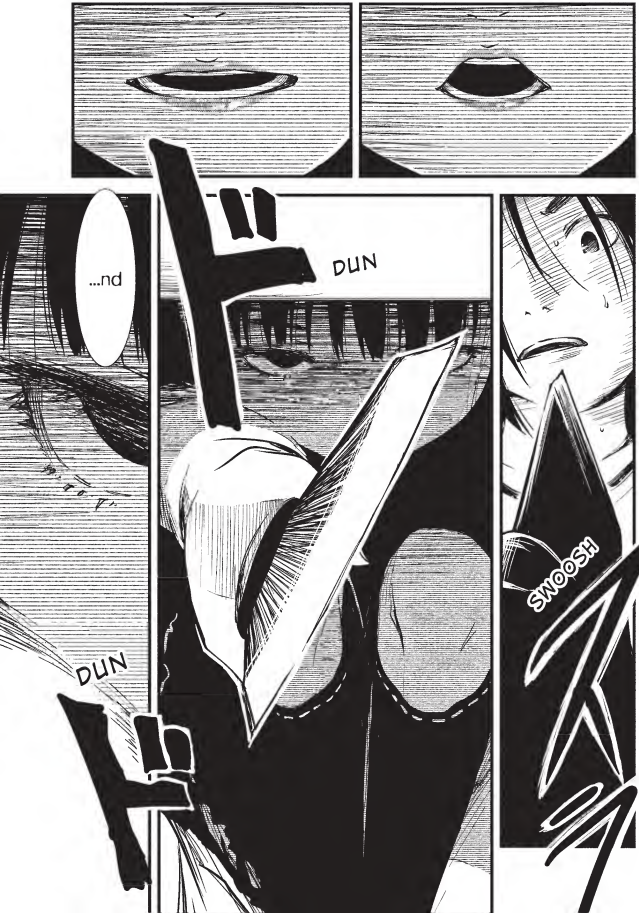

... Yes.
Apartment 601.
Three hours from now? Uhm... Yes, that's fine.
All right. Thank you.
CALL ENDED
ピ BEEP
I wanted to get home early so I could write more of that novel...
But oh well ...
GOOONG ゴォー‥ン
Locksmith Emergency

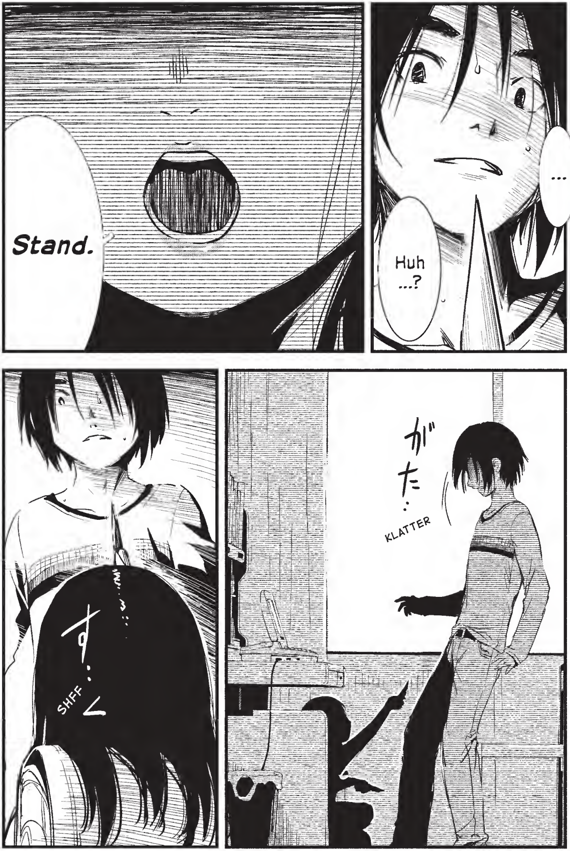

Oh...
KACHAK
カチャ
CHAK
チャッ
All right, I'll be putting on this new lock.
STAAARE
まじまじ
Sure.
You know... I could use this in a novel.
ガ
GACHAK
チャ

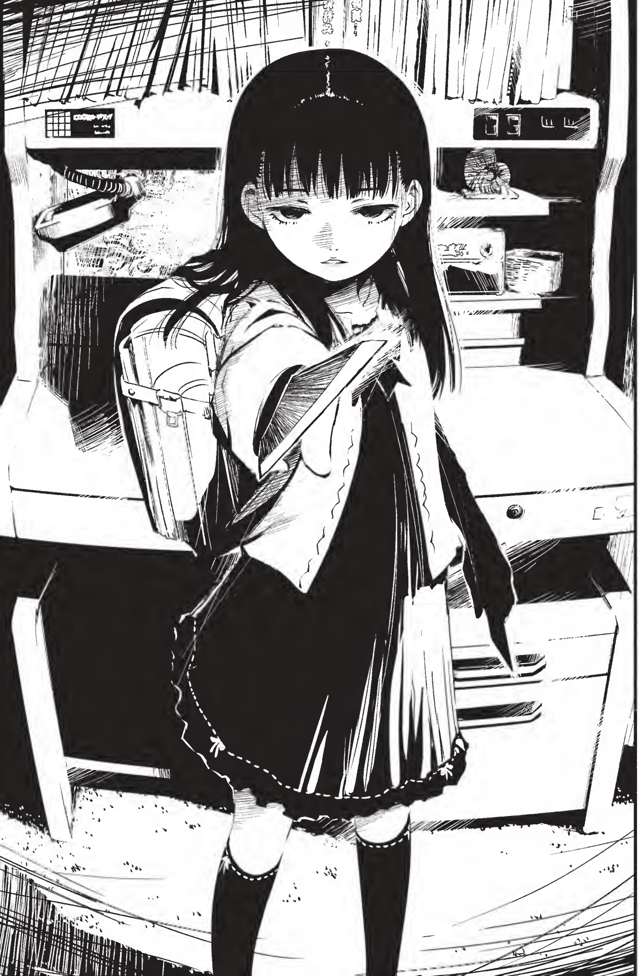

Ah ...
What a terrible day.
ぱさ
FWAP
Guess it was nice that I got to see how a lock works, but even then...
ギッ
KREAK
Okay, then ...
KOKUYO
Sea
Bothriole is
SHARP
カチャ
KACHAK
I should be able to wrap this one up today.

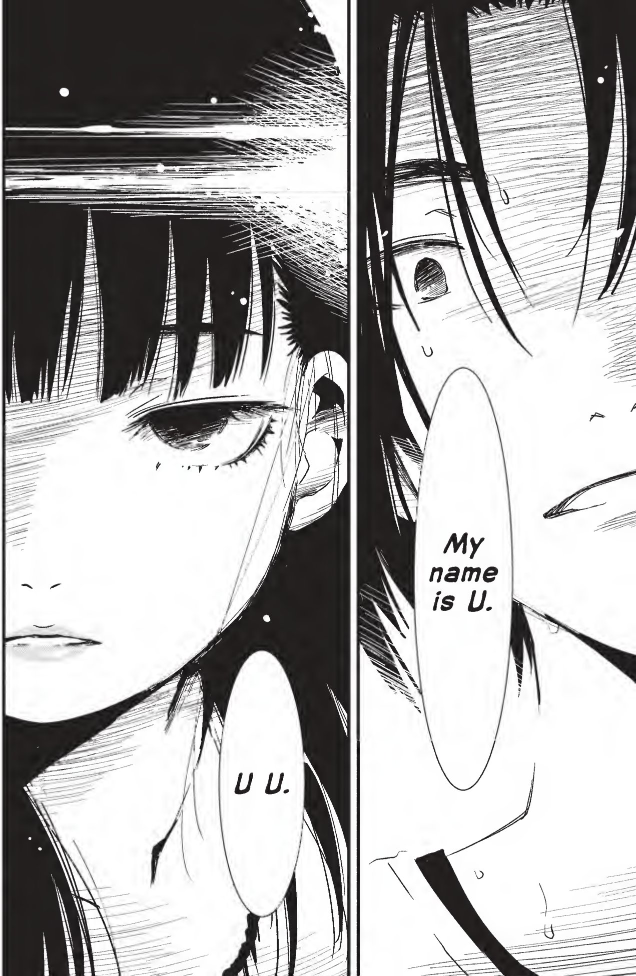

PACHINK
On Power Off
Switch
F1
Switch Font
Half-Width Full-Width
Full-Width Half-Width
Dark
Light
Address Book
Postcard Maker Jiro
Simple Diary
Postcard Address
Postcard Back
Fun Print
Simple Postcard Creation
Navigation
Art Club Stylish Suite
Compose Text
Access Document
Automatic
Press F7 to load user characters or foreign characters.
Menu 1→2
Japanese Word Processing SHOIN
Call System
Call Text
Call Text
Switch Menu
BWOOM...
STAB
Ow ...?!
KREAK
A tack ...?
No, it feels like something stabbed my calf...

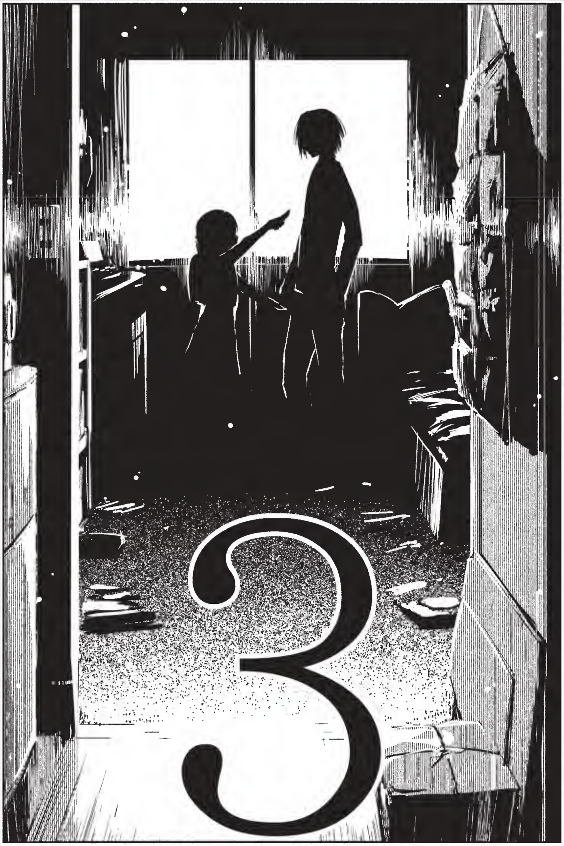

ド
DUN
ド
DUN
... Wha ?!
ド
DUN
ド
DUN
ド
DUN

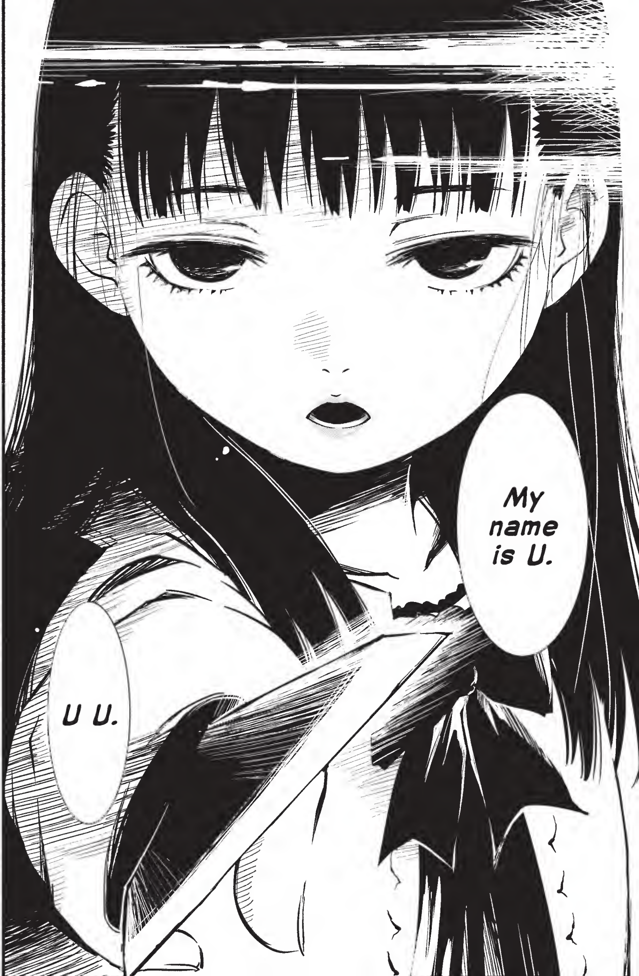

DUN
...nd
SWOOSH
DUN


...
Huh ...?
Stand.
がた‥
KLATTER
ぞ‥る‥
す‥く
SHFF

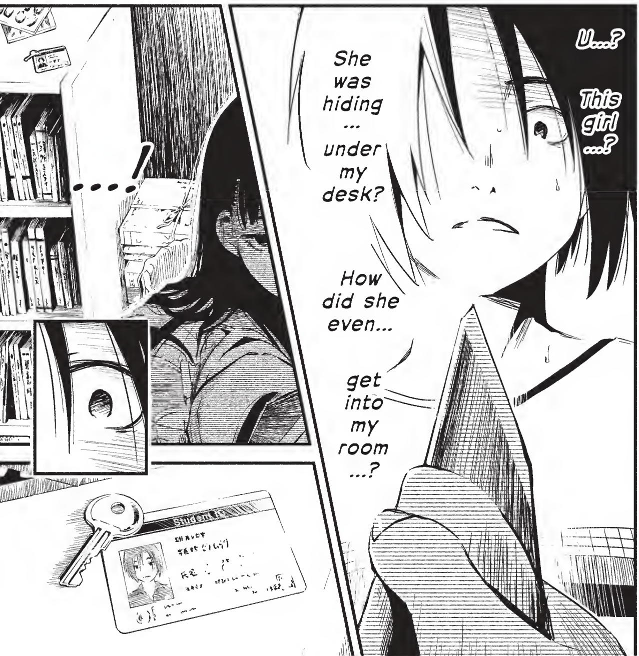


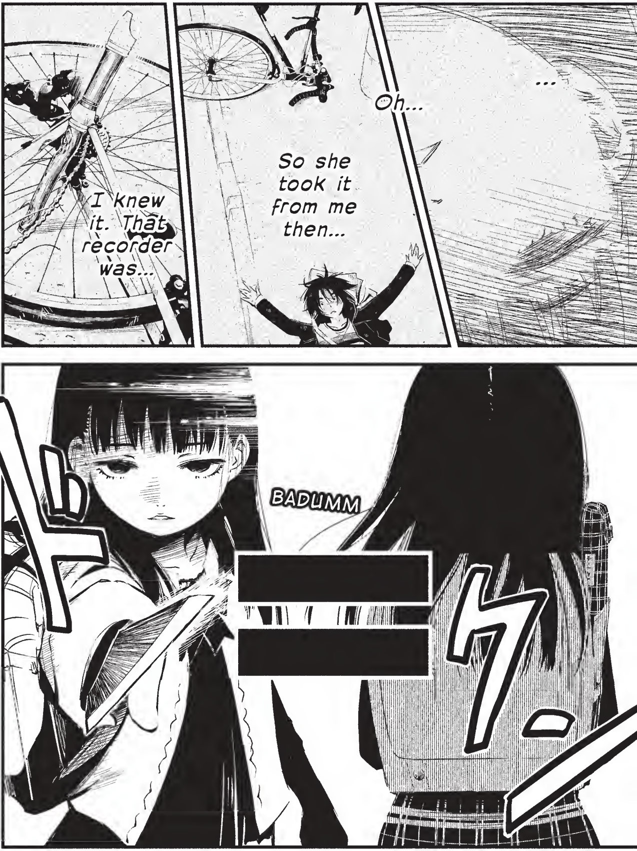

My name is U.
U U.

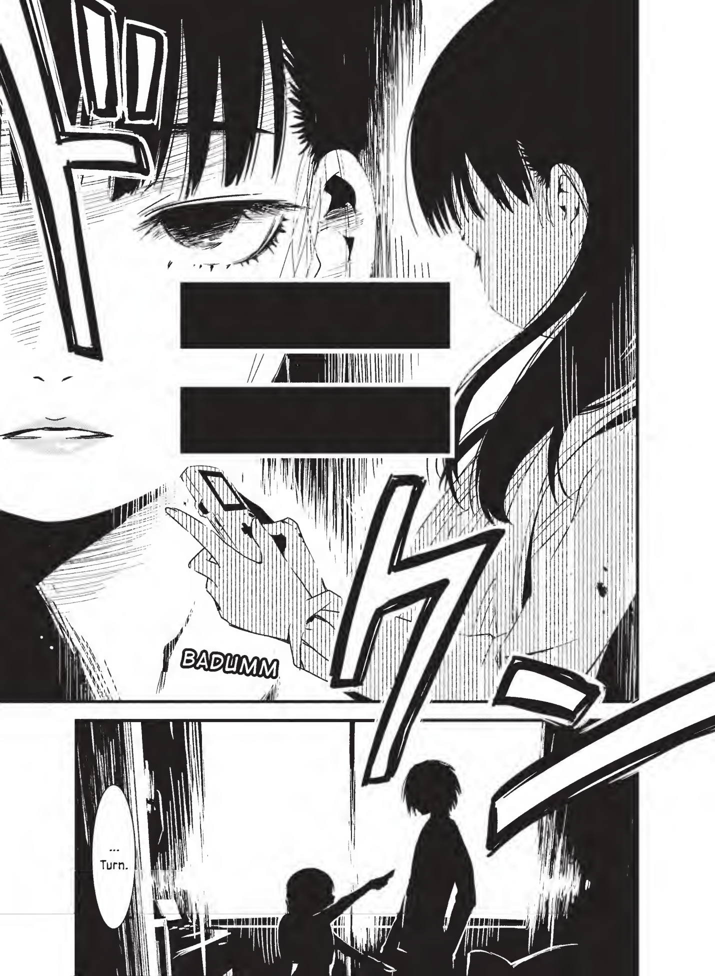

3

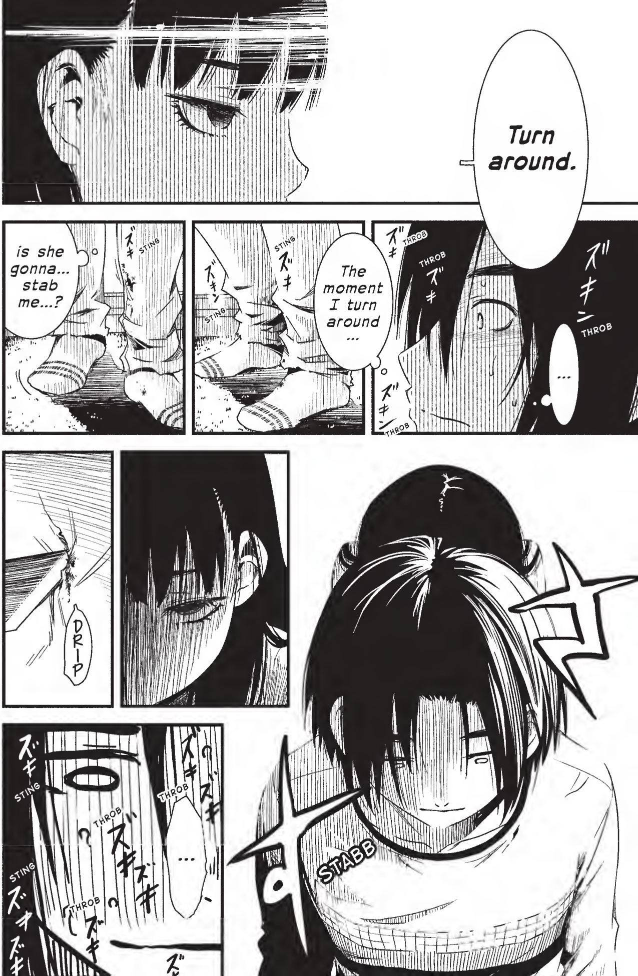

My name is U.
U U.

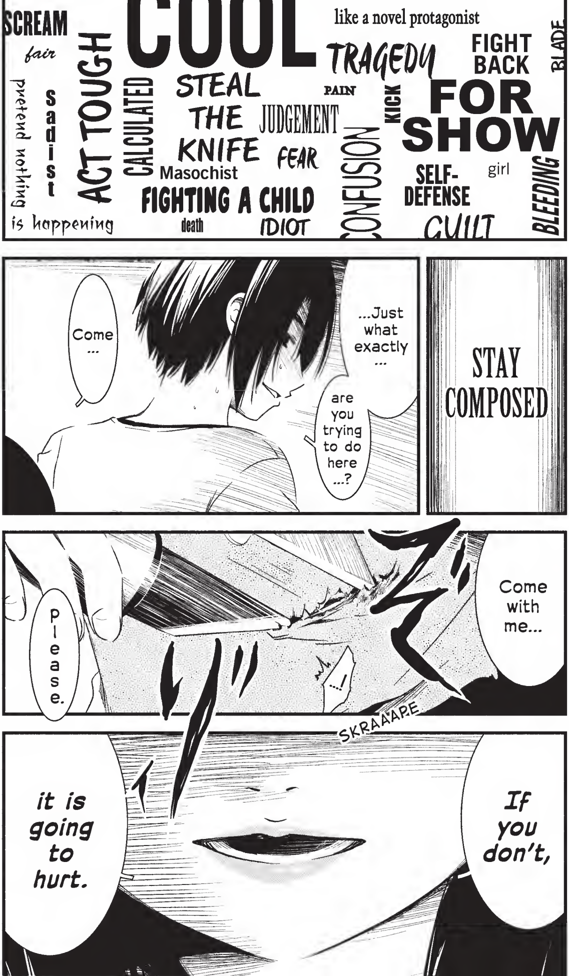
Her name wasn't really a pair of alphabet letters, of course. She gave me her regular Japanese name, but since this is an event and an incident, not a tale, I can't make that public here.

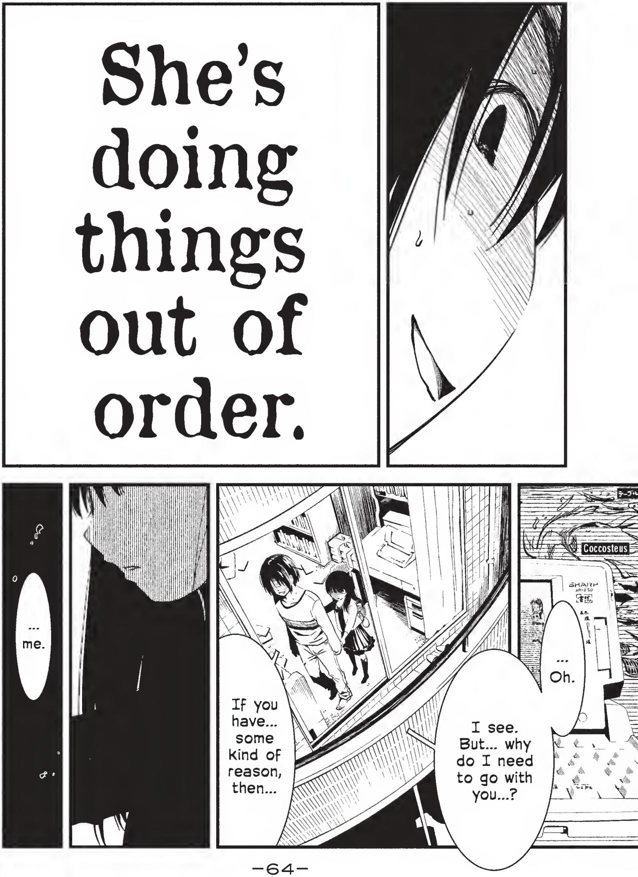

U...?
This girl ...?
She was hiding ... under my desk?
How did she even... get into my room ...?
...!
Student ID

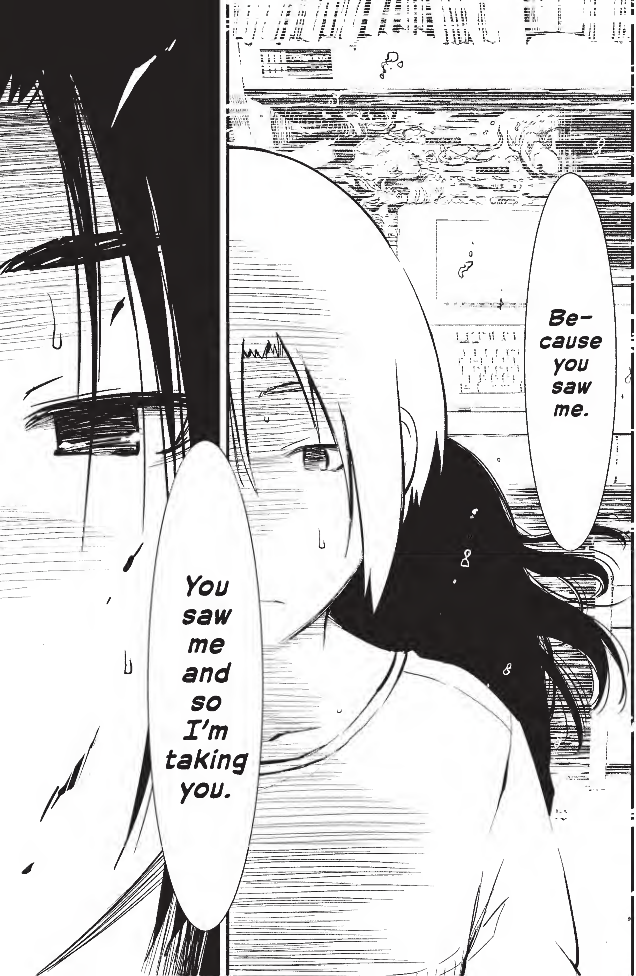

...
Oh...
So she took it from me then...
I knew it. That recorder was...
BADUMM
ドク

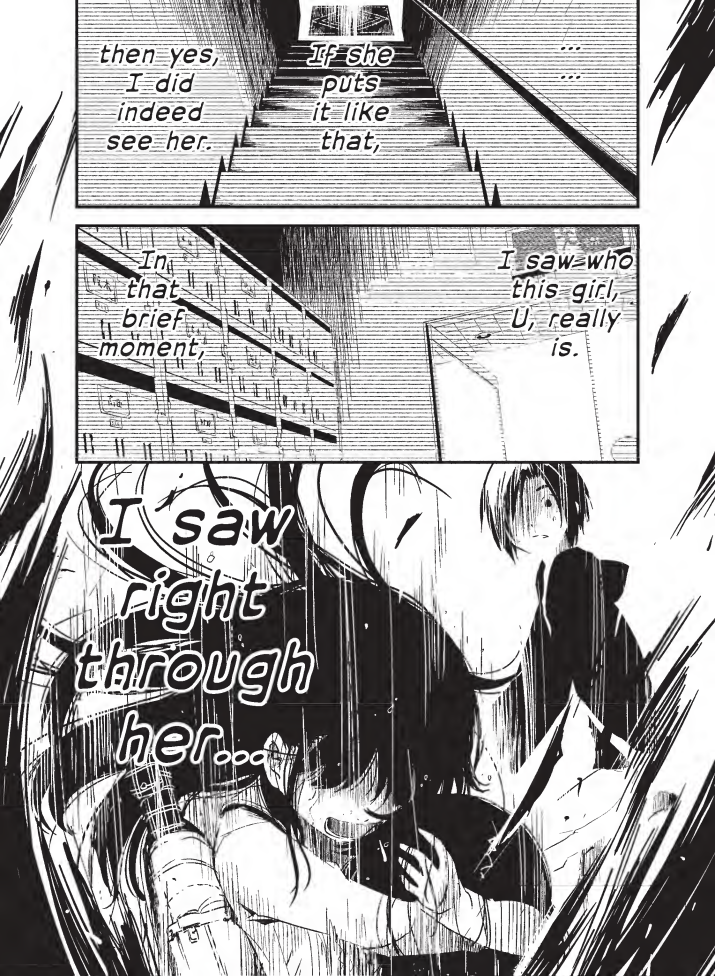

[redacted]
[redacted]
BADUMM
... Turn.

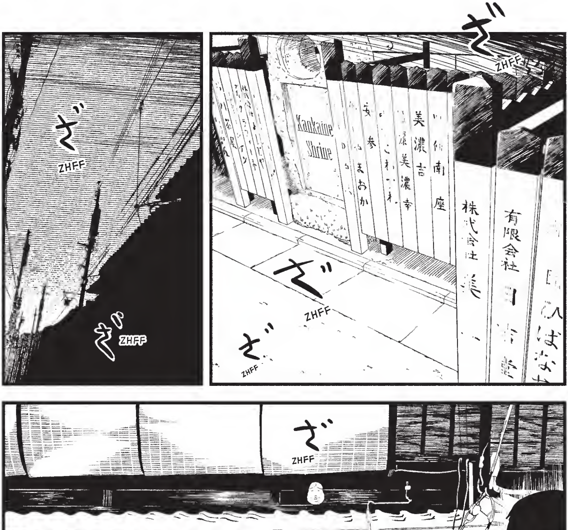

Turn around.
ズキン THROB
ズキ THROB
ズキ THROB
...
ズキン THROB
The moment I turn around ...
ズキ STING
ズキン STING
ズキ STING
is she gonna... stab me...?
STABB
DRIP
ズキ THROB
ズキ THROB
ズキ STING
...
ズキ THROB
ズオ STING
ズキ

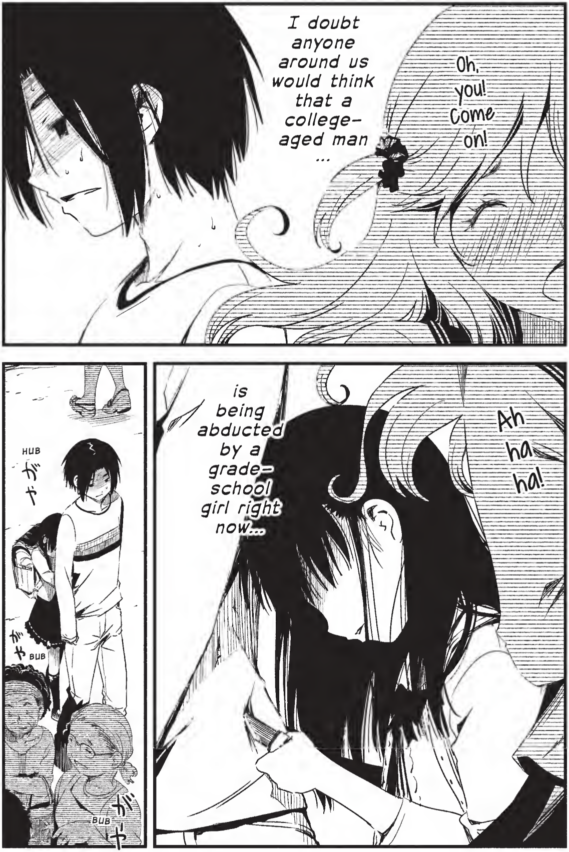

like a novel protagonist
COOL
BLADE
FIGHT BACK
TRAGEDY
PAIN
FOR SHOW
KICK
JUDGEMENT
STEAL THE KNIFE
CALCULATED
ACT TOUGH
sadist
SCREAM
fair
pretend nothing is happening
Masochist
FEAR
CONFUSION
SELF-DEFENSE
girl
BLEEDING
GUILT
IDIOT
death
FIGHTING A CHILD
STAY COMPOSED
...Just what exactly ...
are you trying to do here ...?
Come ...
Come with me...
...!
please.
SKRAAAPE
If you don't,
it is going to hurt.

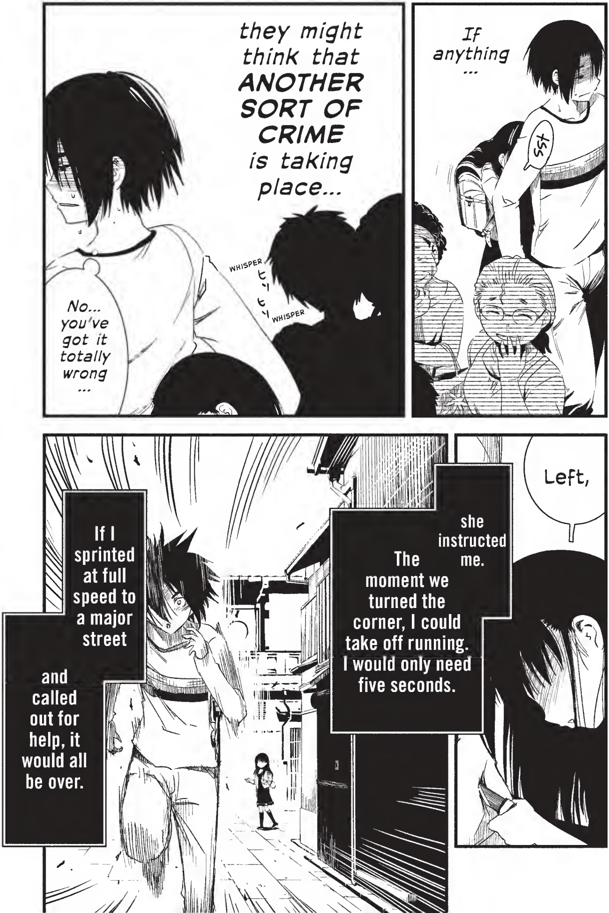

She's doing things out of order.
Coccosteus
SHARP
... Oh.
I see. But... why do I need to go with you...?
If you have... some kind of reason, then...
... me.

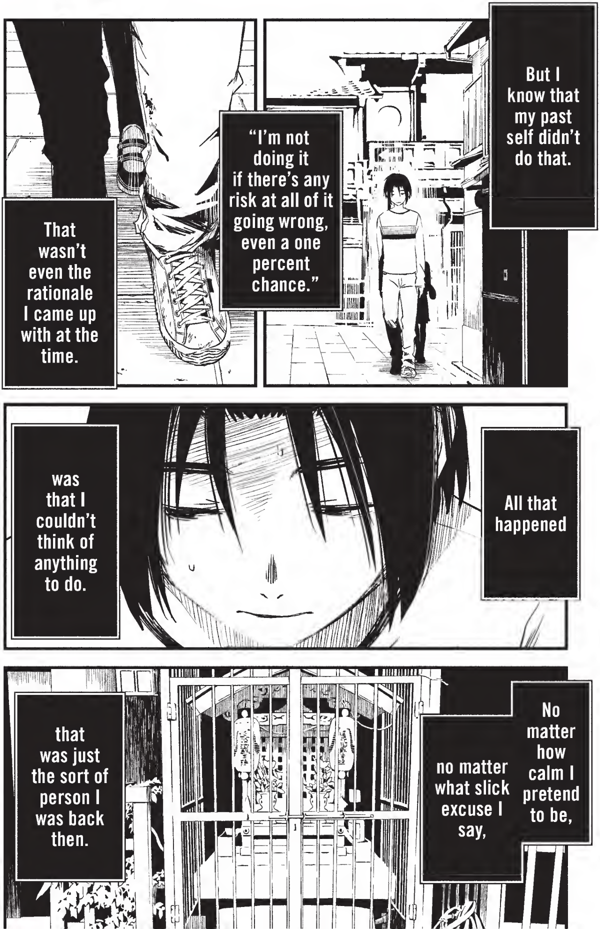

Be-cause you saw me.
You saw me and so I'm taking you.

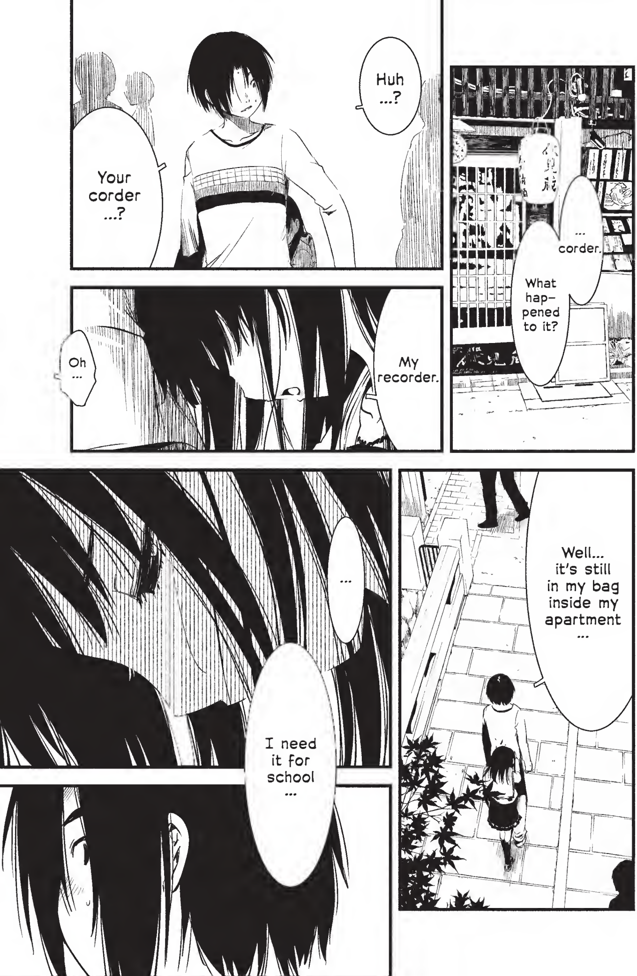

…
…
If she puts it like that,
then yes, I did indeed see her.
I saw who this girl, U, really is.
In that brief moment,
I saw right through her…

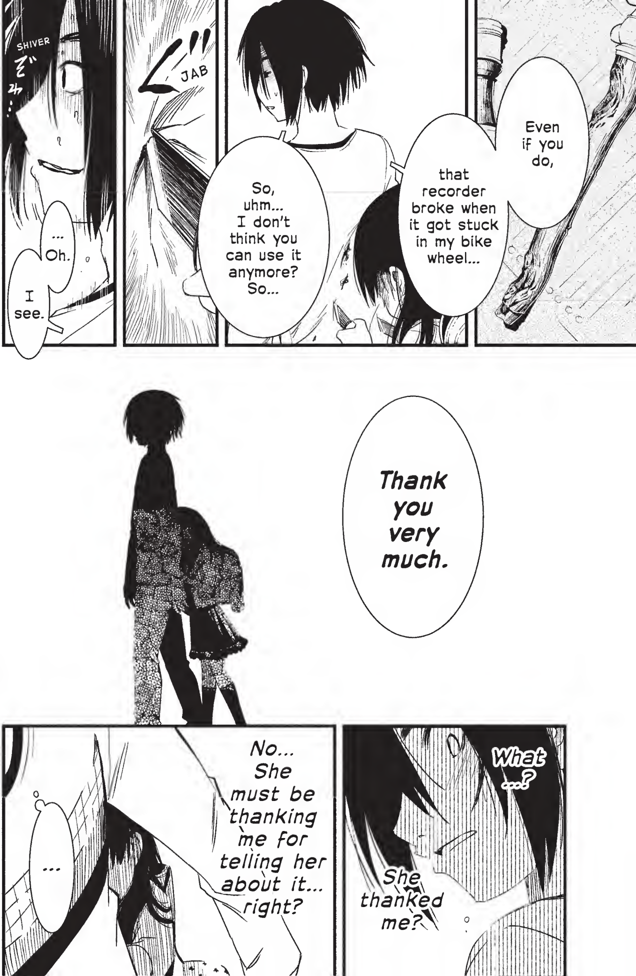

ざ
ZHFF
有限会社
株式会社
南座
美濃吉
美濃幸
安参
まおか
Kaokaine Shrine
ざ
ZHFF
ざ
ZHFF
ざ
ZHFF
ざ
ZHFF
ざ
ZHFF
ざ
ZHFF

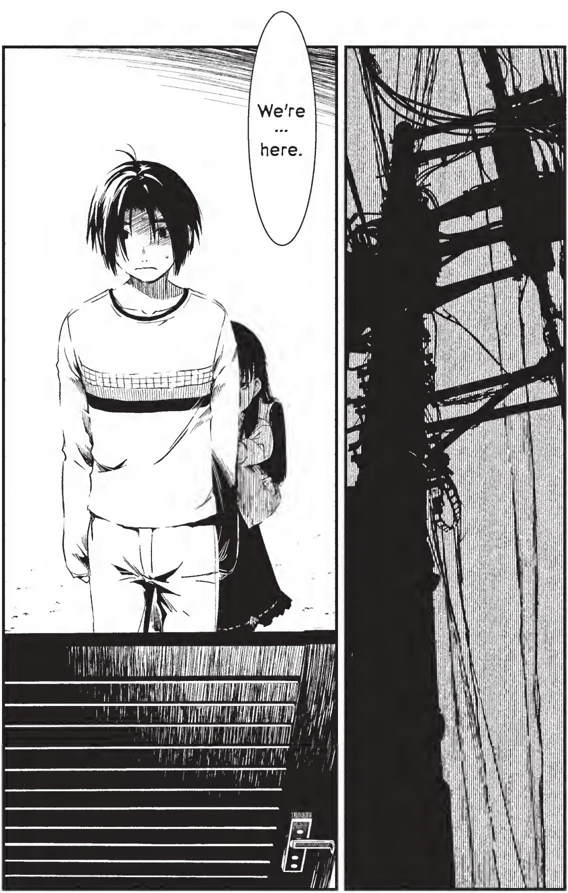

Oh, you! Come on!
I doubt anyone around us would think that a college-aged man ...
Ah ha ha!
is being abducted by a grade-school girl right now...
HUB ガヤ
ガヤ BUB
ガヤ BUB

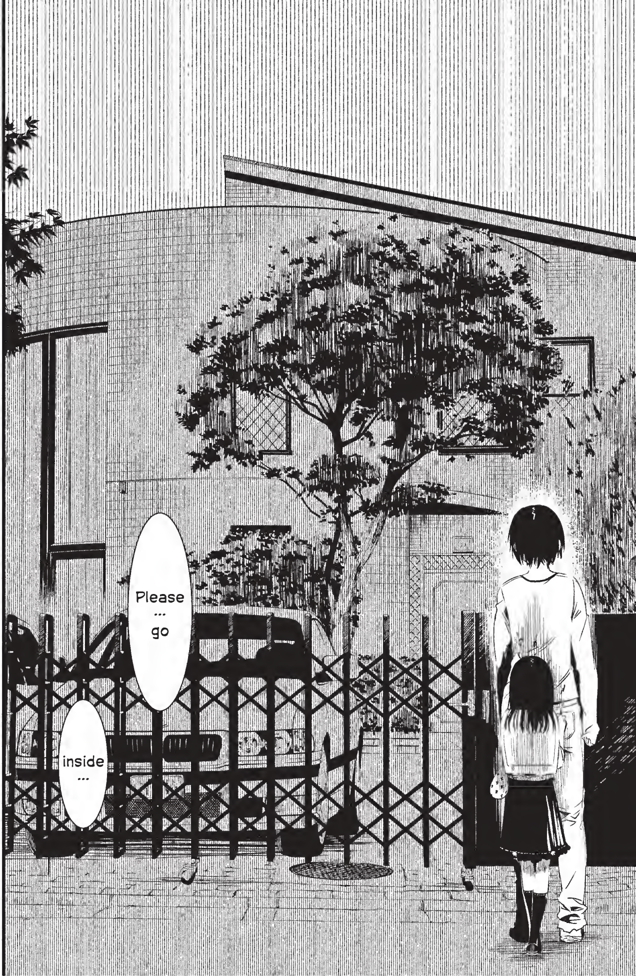

If anything...
tsk
they might think that **ANOTHER SORT OF CRIME** is taking place...
WHISPER ヒソ ヒソ WHISPER
No... you've got it totally wrong...
Left,
she instructed me.
The moment we turned the corner, I could take off running. I would only need five seconds.
If I sprinted at full speed to a major street
and called out for help, it would all be over.


But I know that my past self didn't do that.
"I'm not doing it if there's any risk at all of it going wrong, even a one percent chance."
That wasn't even the rationale I came up with at the time.
All that happened
was that I couldn't think of anything to do.
No matter how calm I pretend to be,
no matter what slick excuse I say,
that was just the sort of person I was back then.

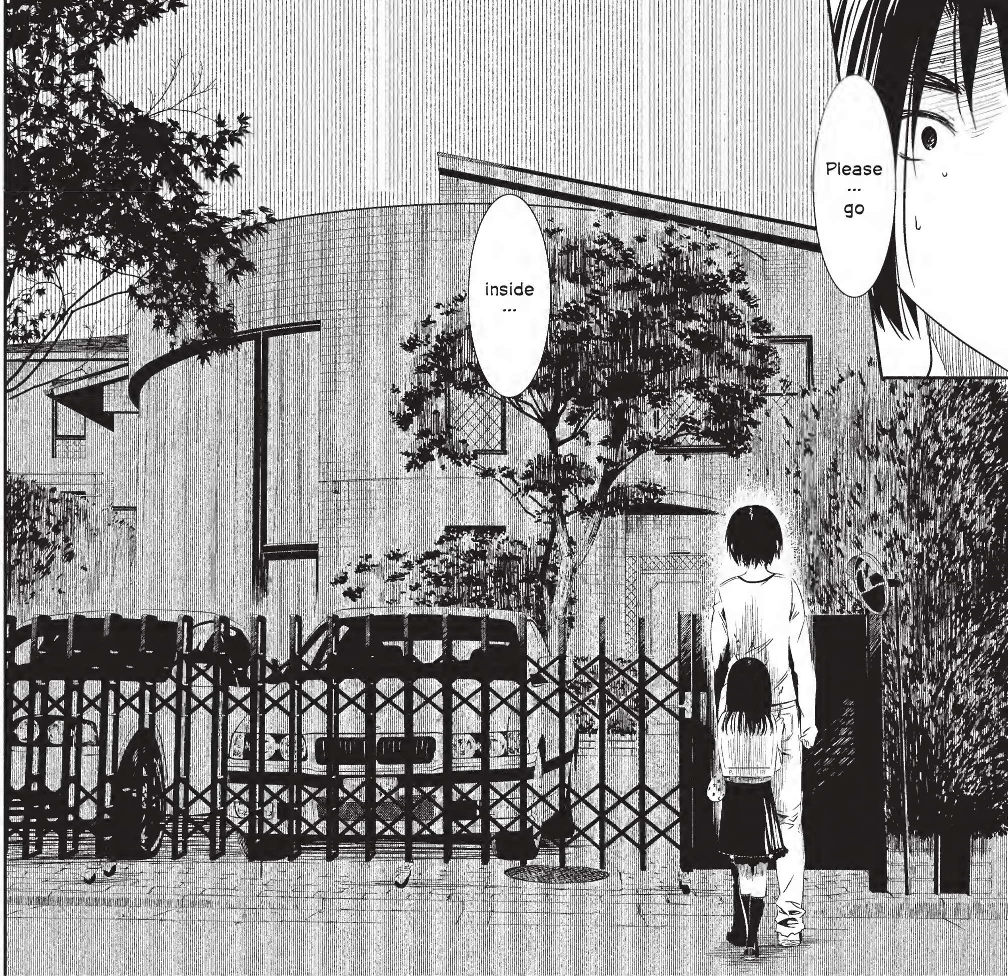

... corder.
What hap-pened to it?
Huh ...?
Your corder ...?
My recorder.
Oh ...
Well... it's still in my bag inside my apartment ...
...
I need it for school ...

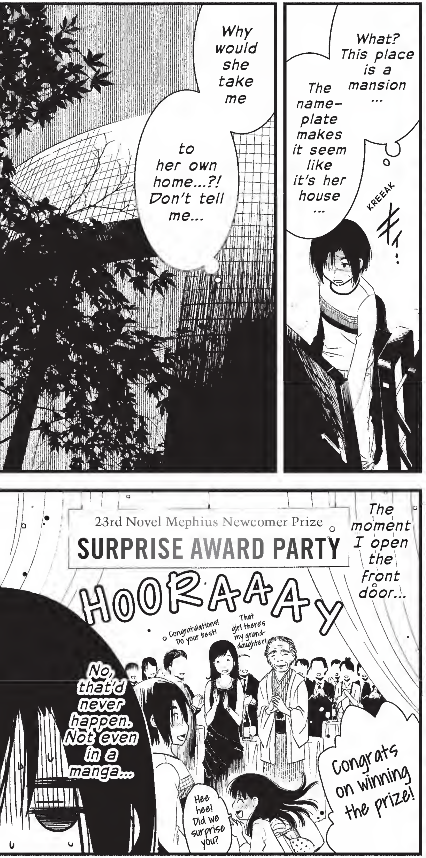

Even if you do,
that recorder broke when it got stuck in my bike wheel...
So, uhm... I don't think you can use it anymore? So...
JAB
SHIVER
ゾわ
... Oh.
I see.
Thank you very much.
What ...?
She thanked me?
No... She must be thanking me for telling her about it... right?
...

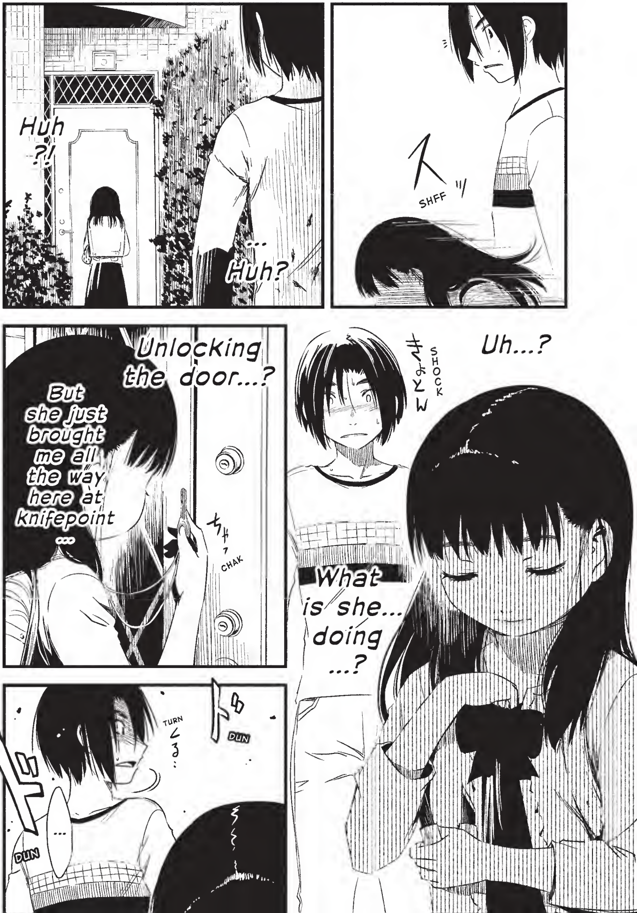

We're ... here.

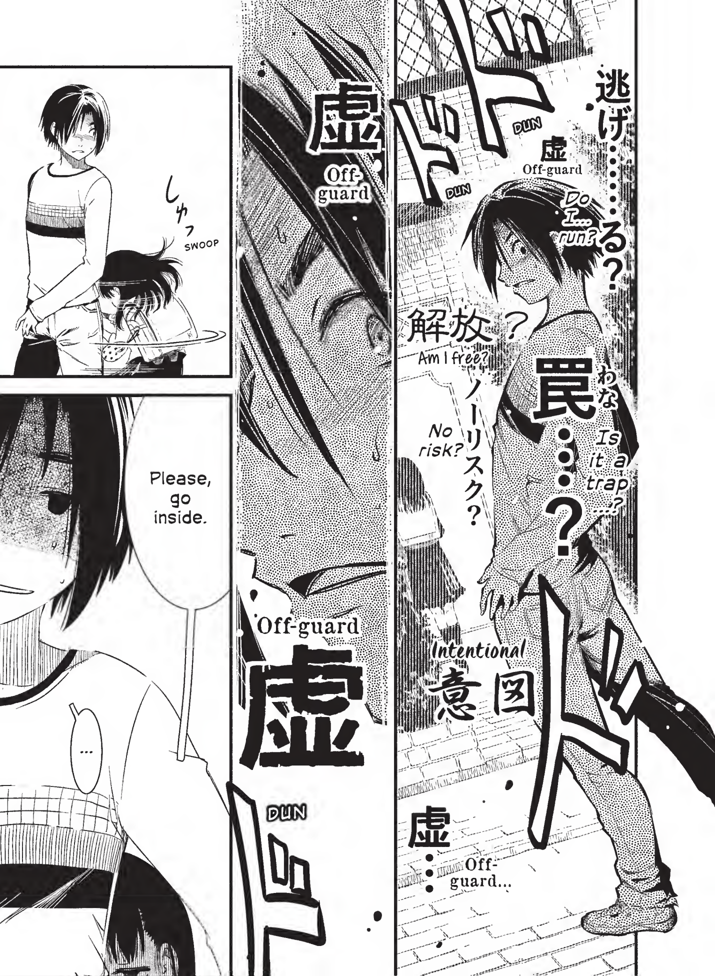

Please … go
inside …

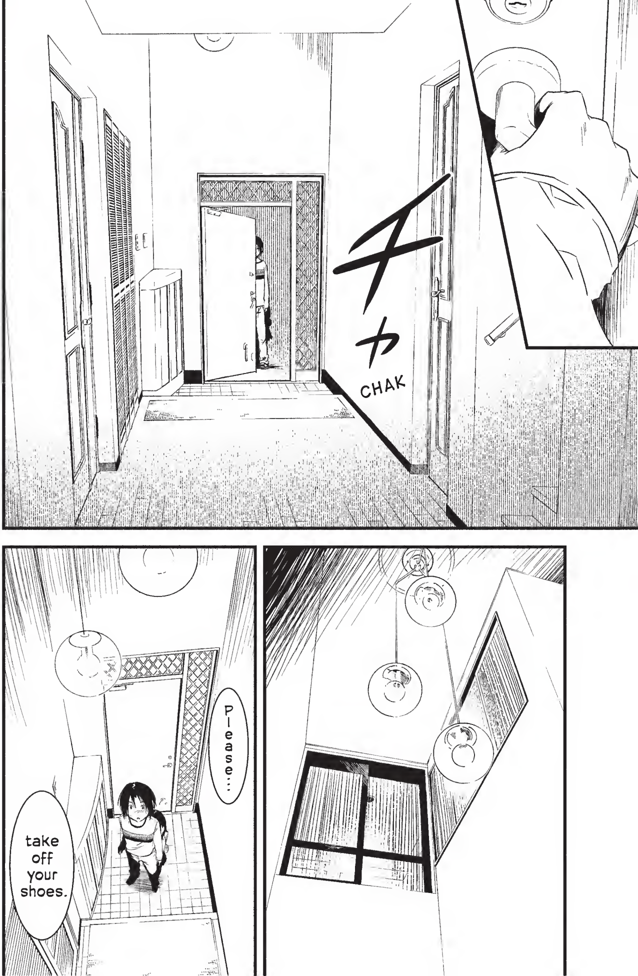
4

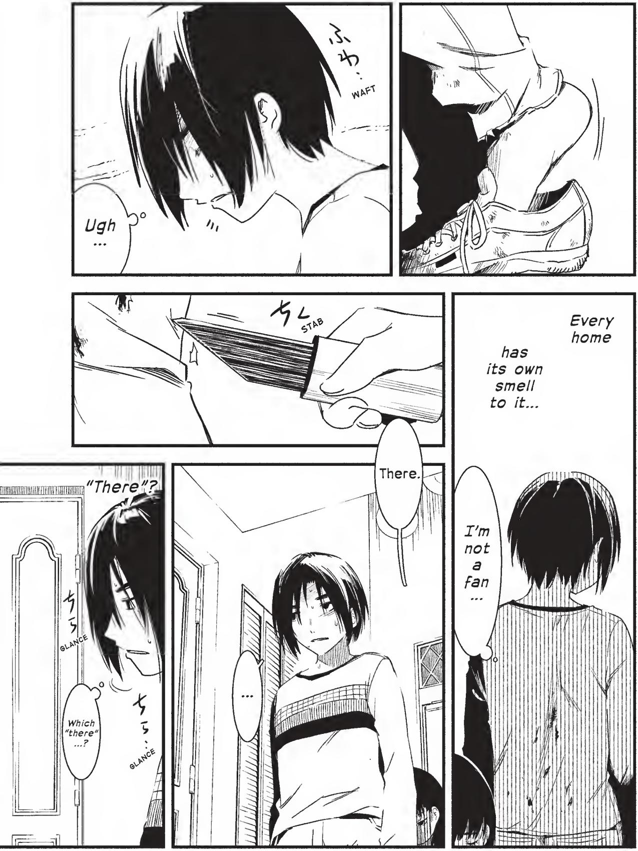

Please ... go
inside ...

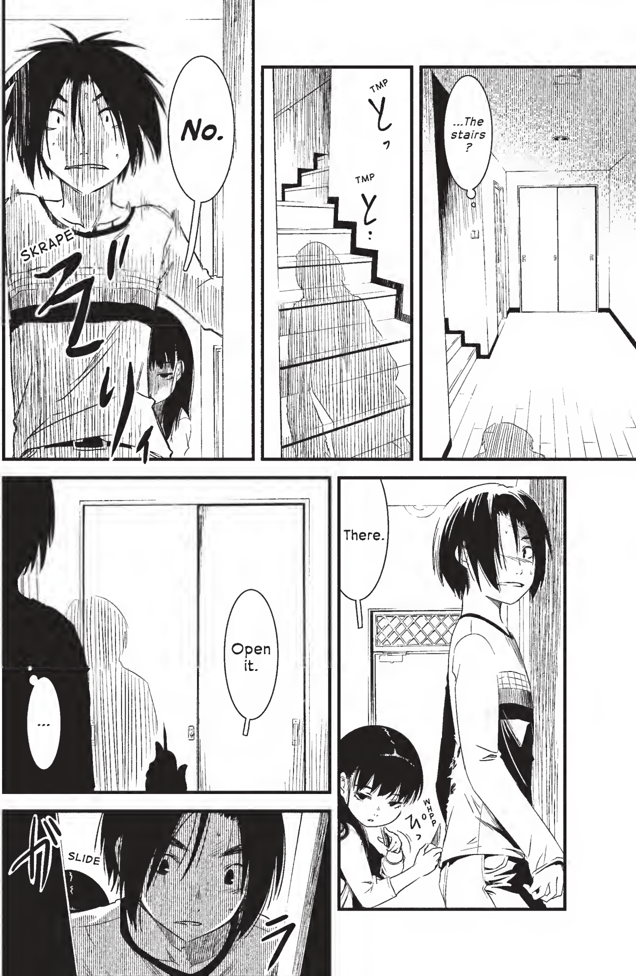

What? This place is a mansion ...
The name-plate makes it seem like it's her house ...
KREEAK
Why would she take me to her own home...?! Don't tell me...
The moment I open the front door...
23rd Novel Mephius Newcomer Prize
SURPRISE AWARD PARTY
HOORAAAY
That girl there's my grand-daughter!
Congratulations! Do your best!
Congrats on winning the prize!
Hee hee! Did we surprise you?
No, that'd never happen. Not even in a manga...

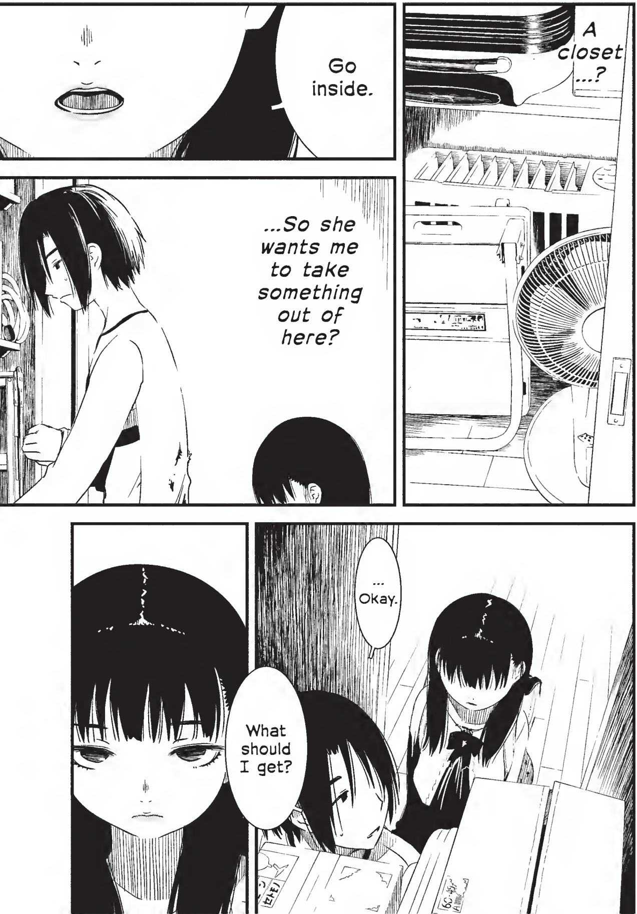

スッ
SHFF
Huh ?!
... Huh?
Uh...?
きょとん
SHOCK
What is she... doing ...?
Unlocking the door...?
But she just brought me all the way here at knifepoint ...
ちゃっ
CHAK
ドン
DUN
くる
TURN
ドン
DUN
...

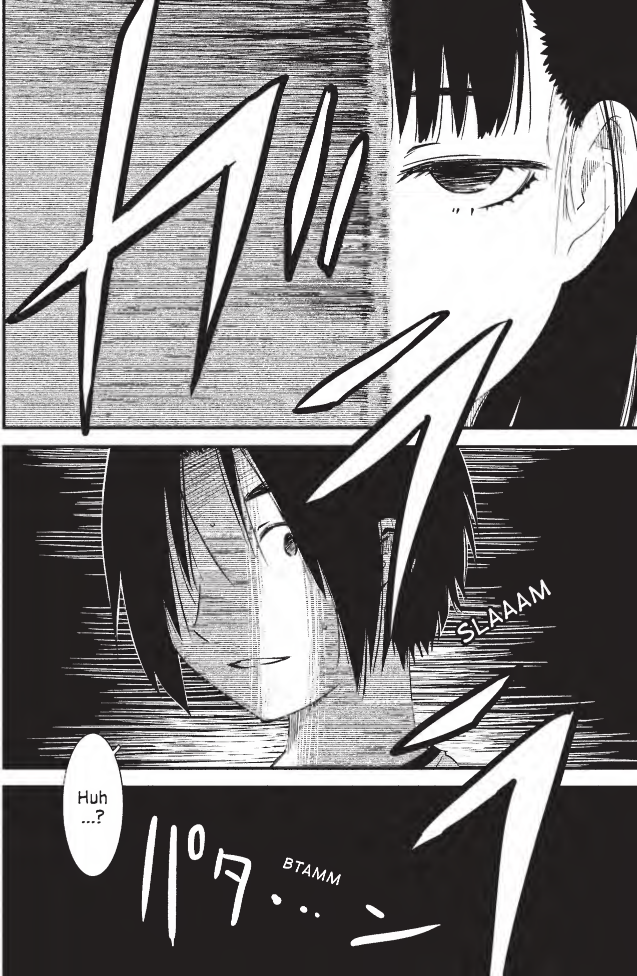

DUN
DUN
逃げ……る？
Do I... run?
虚
Off-guard
解放？
Am I free?
罠わな……？
Is it a trap...?
ノーリスク？
No risk?
意図
Intentional
虚…
Off-guard...
虚
Off-guard
Off-guard
虚
DUN
しゅっ
SWOOP
Please, go inside.
...

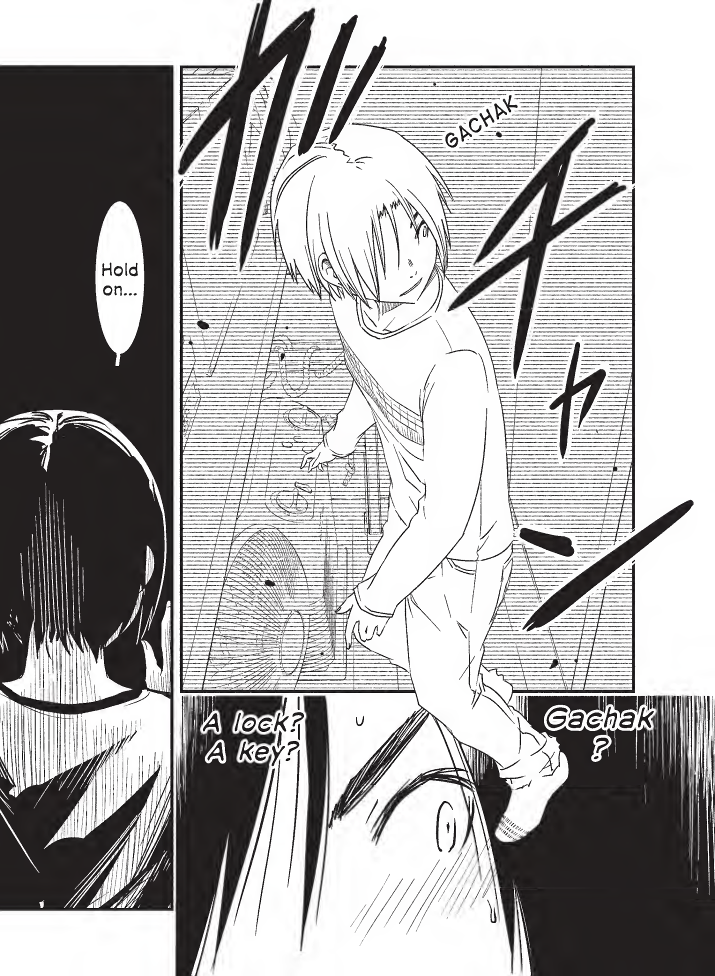

チャ
カ
CHAK
Please…
take off your shoes.

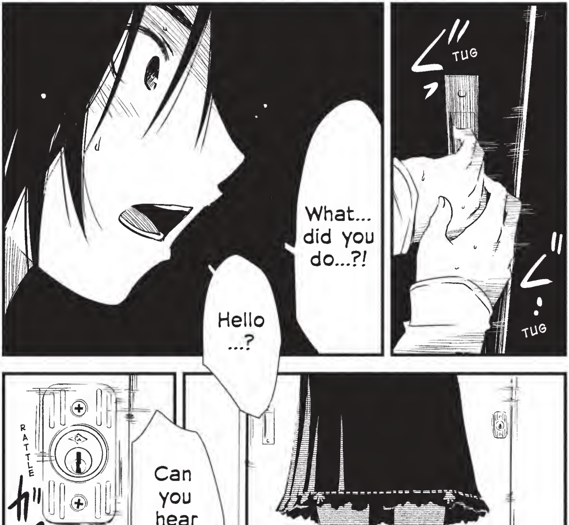

ふわ…
WAFT
Ugh…
Every home has its own smell to it…
I'm not a fan…
ちく
STAB
There.
…
"There"?
ちら
GLANCE
ちら…
GLANCE
Which "there"…?

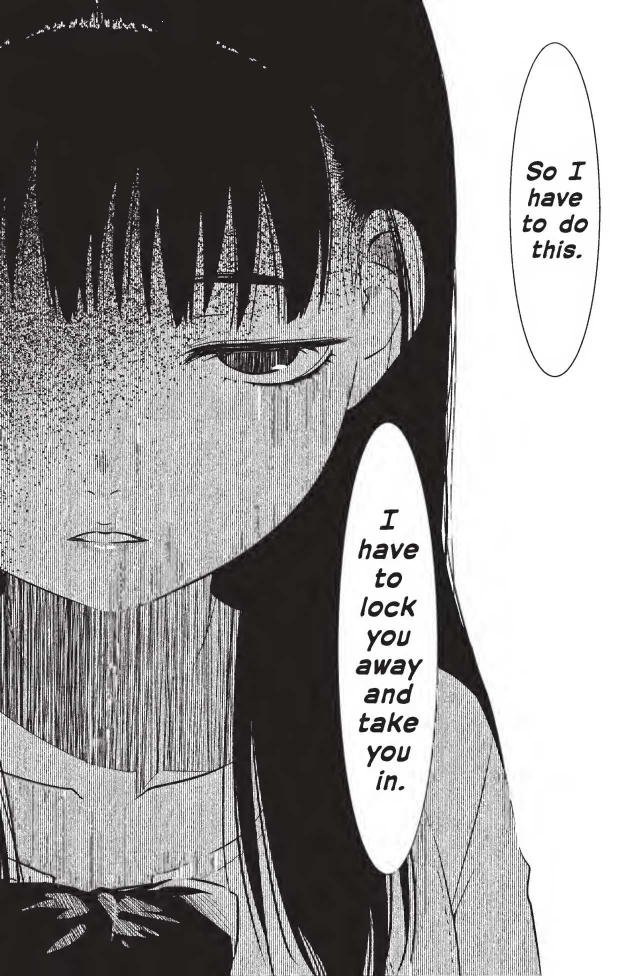

...The stairs?
TMP
とっ
TMP
とっ
No.
SKRAPE
ずりィ
There.
WHPP
ひっ
Open it.
...
SLIDE
ガ
ラ

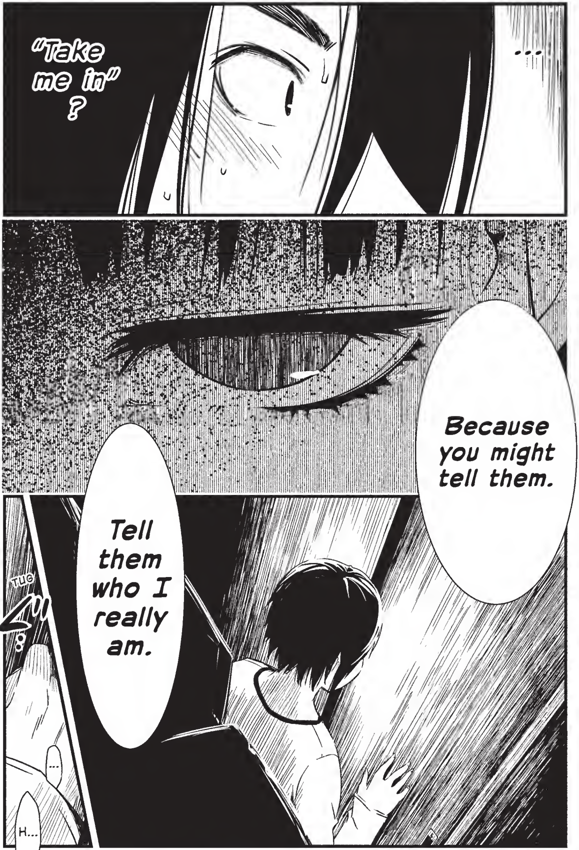

A closet ...?
Go inside.
...So she wants me to take something out of here?
... Okay.
What should I get?

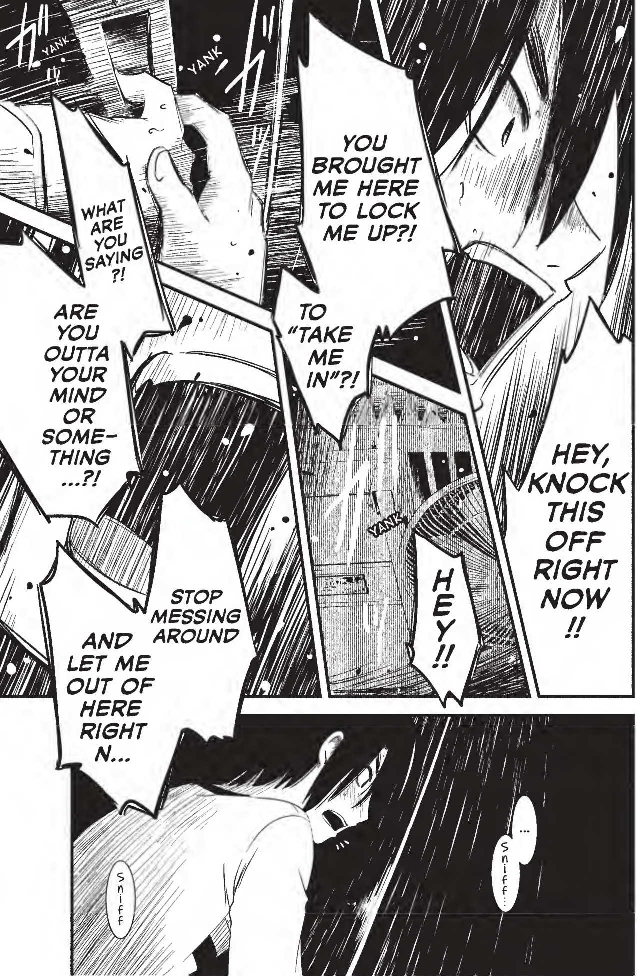

SLAAAM
Huh ...?
BTAMM
パタ…ン

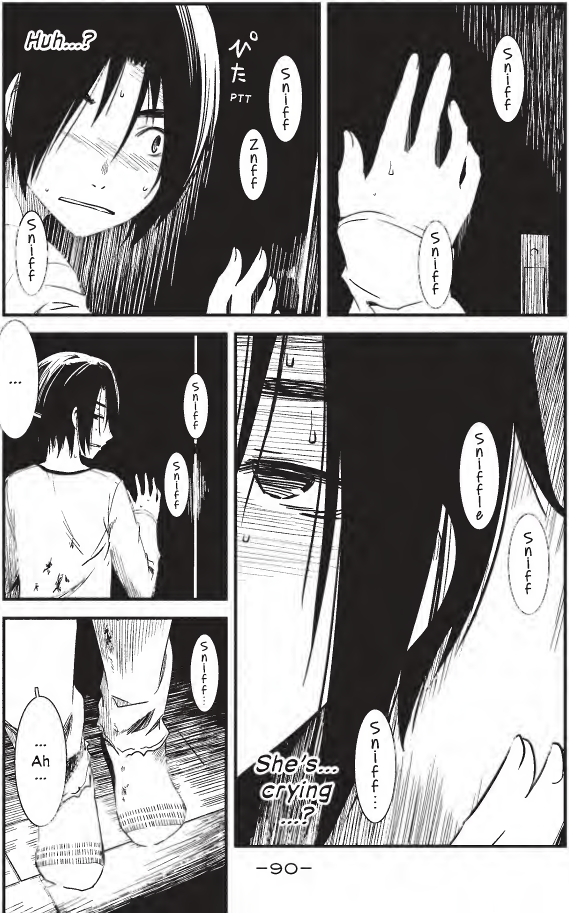

GACHAK
ガチャン
Gachak ?
A lock? A key?
Hold on...

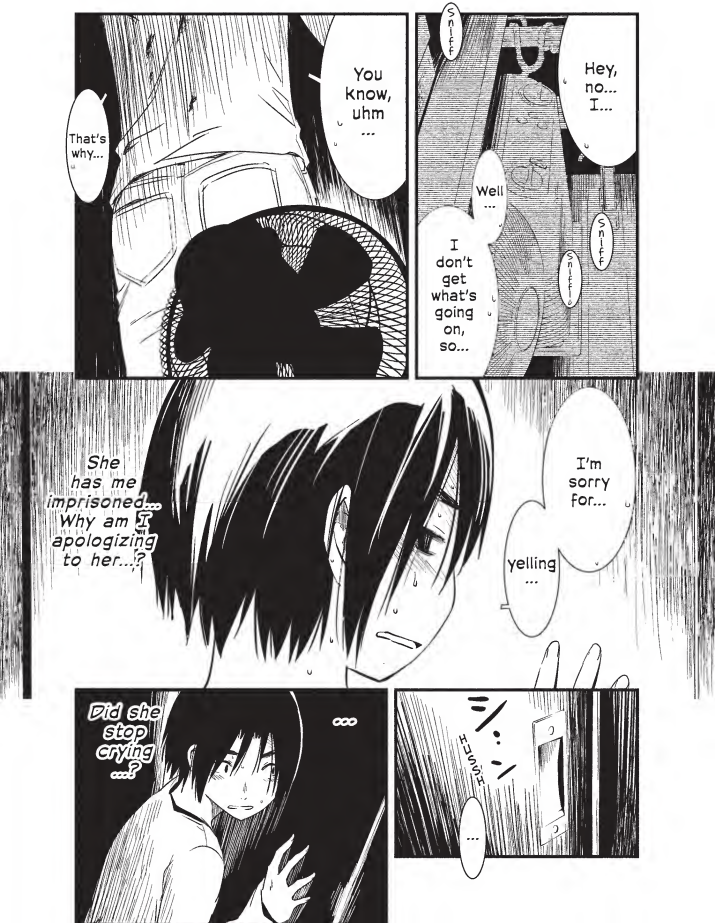

ぐ" TUG
ぐ" TUG
What... did you do...?!
Hello ...?
Can you hear me ?!
ガタ RATTLE
Hey !
ガタ RATTLE
ガタ RATTLE
... You
saw me.

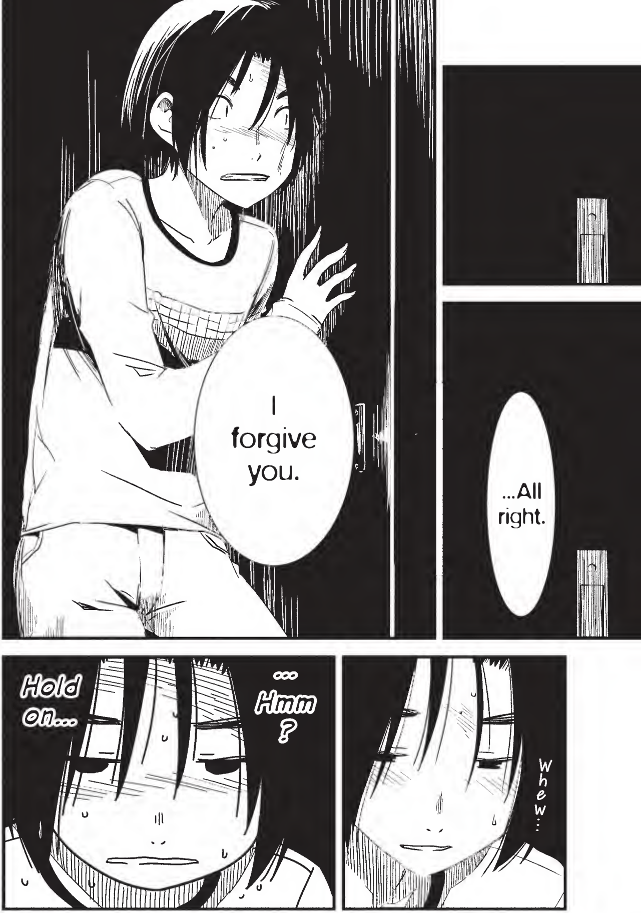

So I have to do this.
I have to lock you away and take you in.

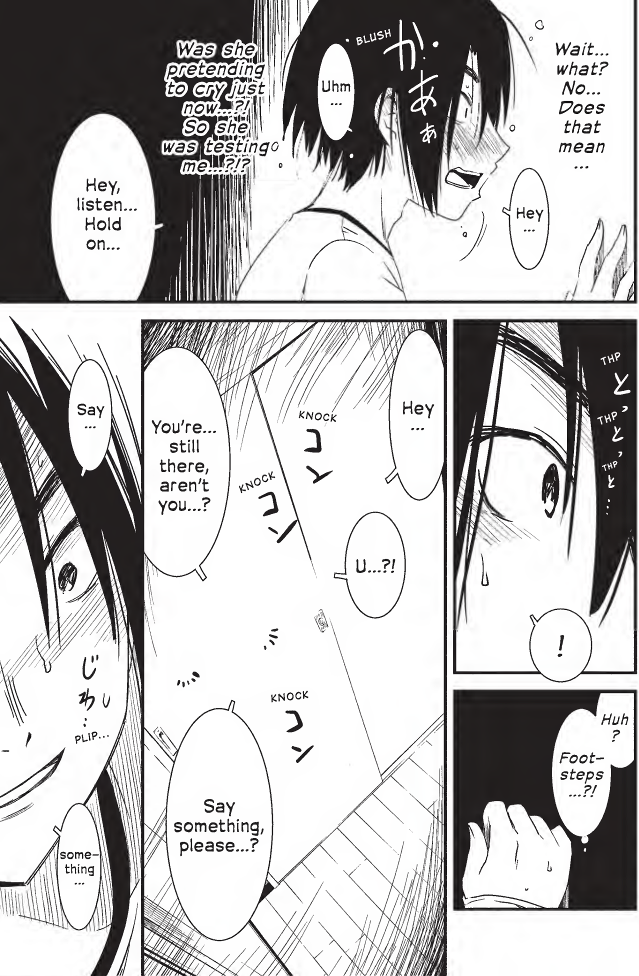

...
"Take me in"?
Because you might tell them.
Tell them who I really am.
TUG
...
H...

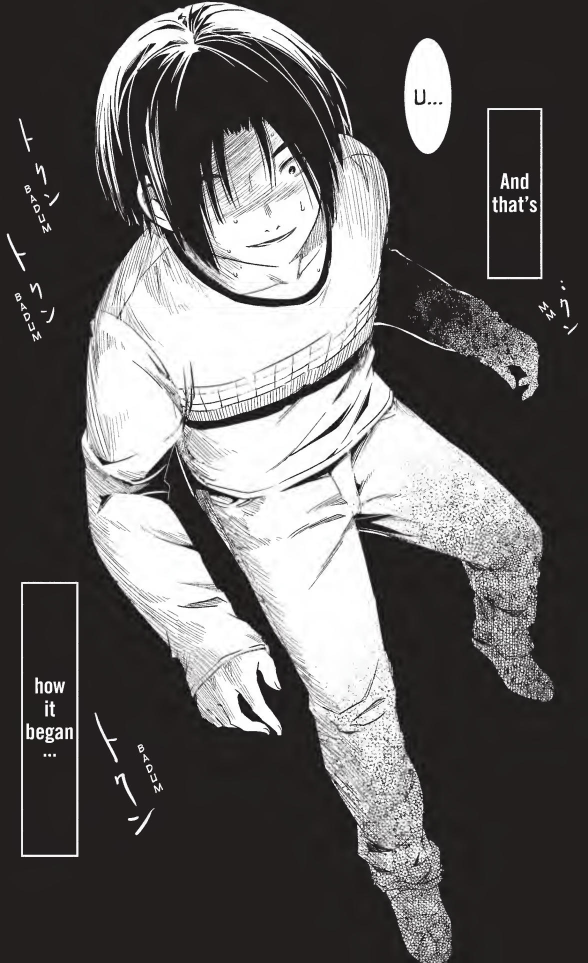

YANK
YANK
YOU BROUGHT ME HERE TO LOCK ME UP?!
TO "TAKE ME IN"?!
WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?!
ARE YOU OUTTA YOUR MIND OR SOMETHING...?!
HEY, KNOCK THIS OFF RIGHT NOW!!
HEY!!
YANK
STOP MESSING AROUND AND LET ME OUT OF HERE RIGHT N...
...
Sniff...
Sniff

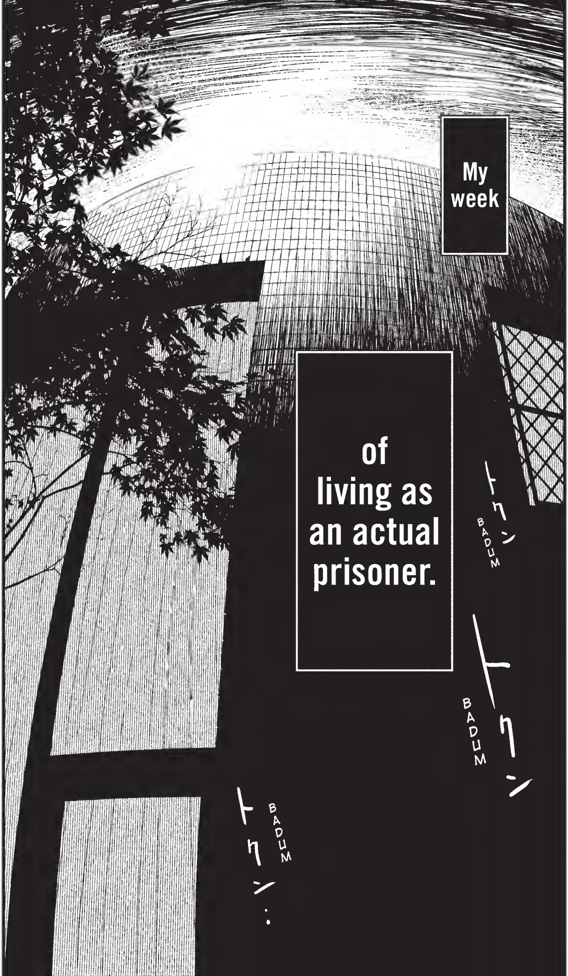

Sniff
Sniff
Huh...?
ぴた
PTT
Sniff
Znff
Sniff
Sniffle
Sniff
Sniff...
She's... crying...?
...
Sniff
Sniff
Sniff...
... Ah ...

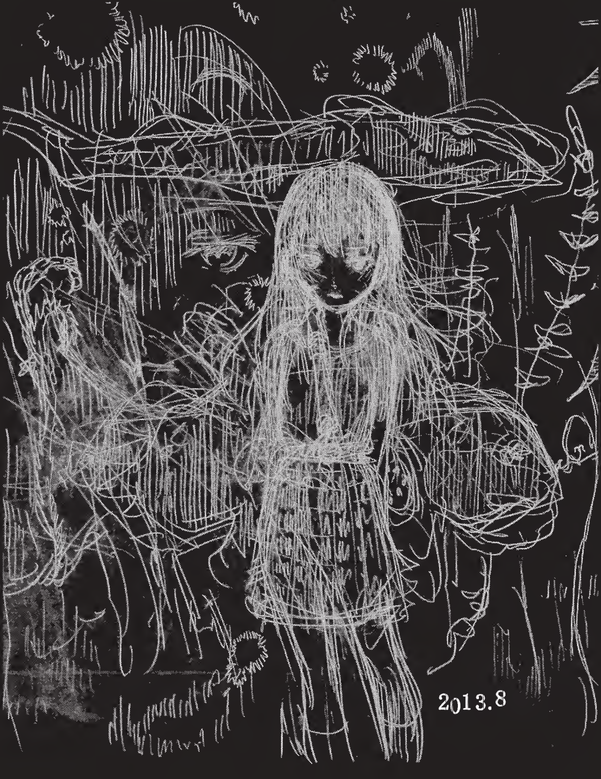

Sniff
Hey, no... I...
Well...
I don't get what's going on, so...
Sniff
Sniffle
You know, uhm...
That's why...
I'm sorry for...
yelling...
She has me imprisoned... Why am I apologizing to her...?
HUSSH
...
...
Did she stop crying...?


...All right.
I forgive you.
Whew...
...Hmm?
Hold on...


Wait... what? No... Does that mean...
Hey...
BLUSH
かあぁ
Uhm...
Was she pretending to cry just now...?! So she was testing me...?!?
Hey, listen... Hold on...
THP と
THP と
THP と...
!
Huh? Footsteps...?!
Hey...
KNOCK コン
KNOCK コン
You're... still there, aren't you...?
U...?!
KNOCK コン
Say something, please...?
Say...
じわ
PLIP...
some-thing...


U...
And that's
…ク ン
MM
トクン
BADUM
トクン
BADUM
how it began...
トクン
BADUM


My week
of living as an actual prisoner.
トクン BADUM
トクン BADUM
トクン… BADUM



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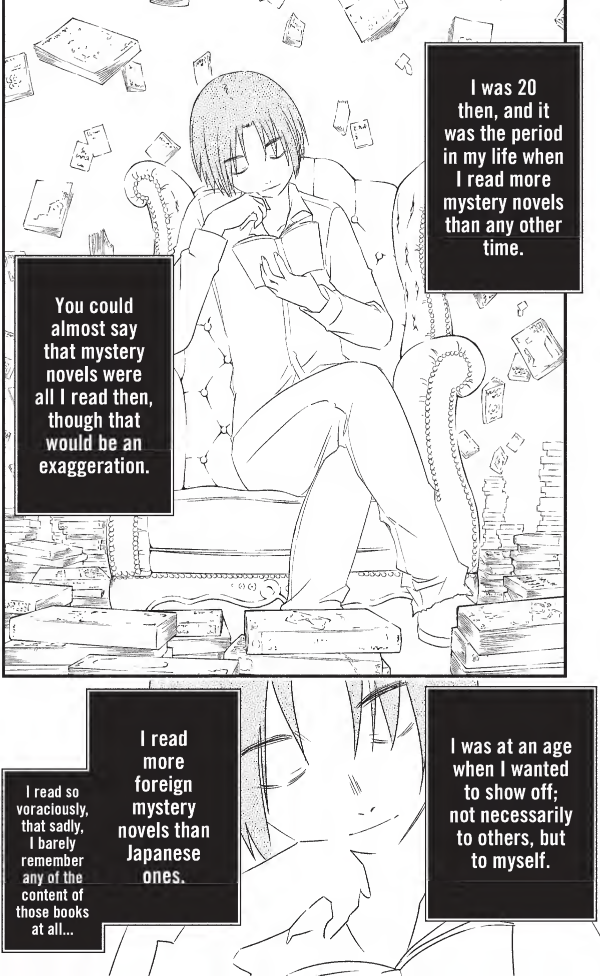
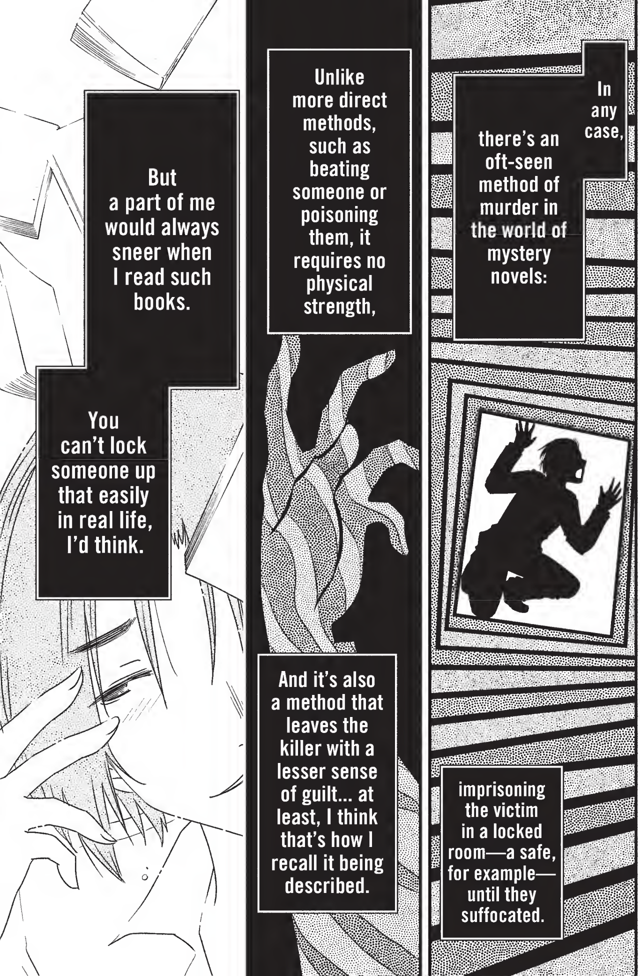
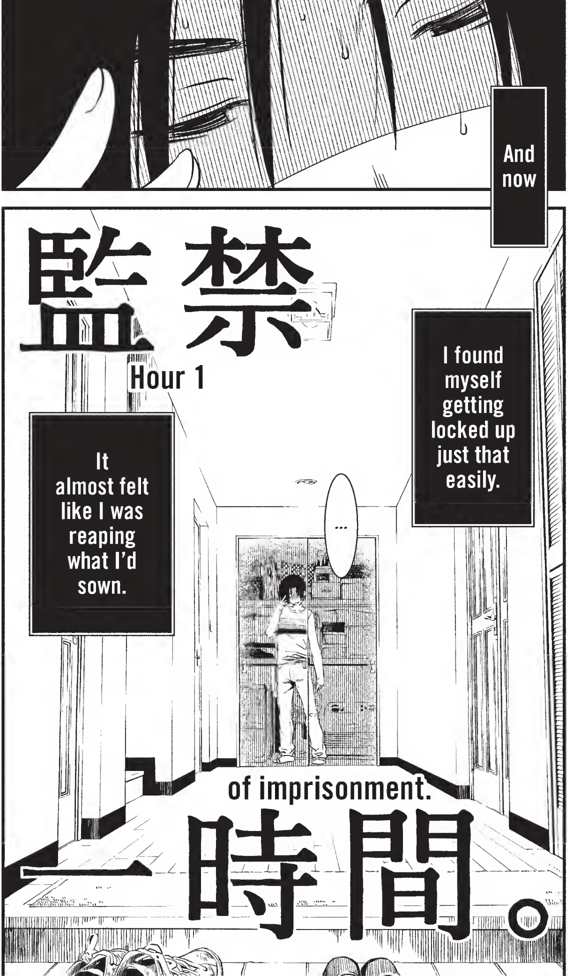
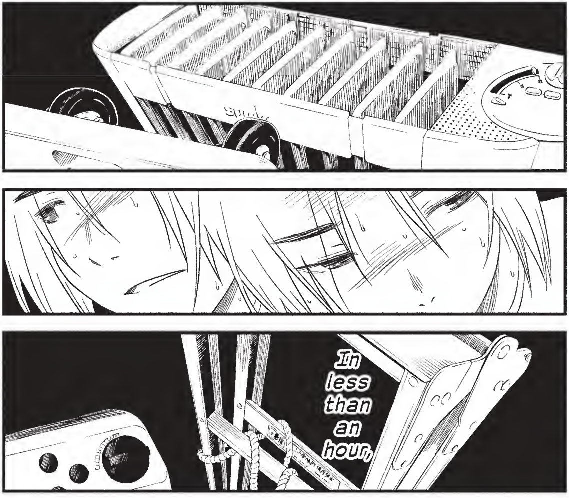
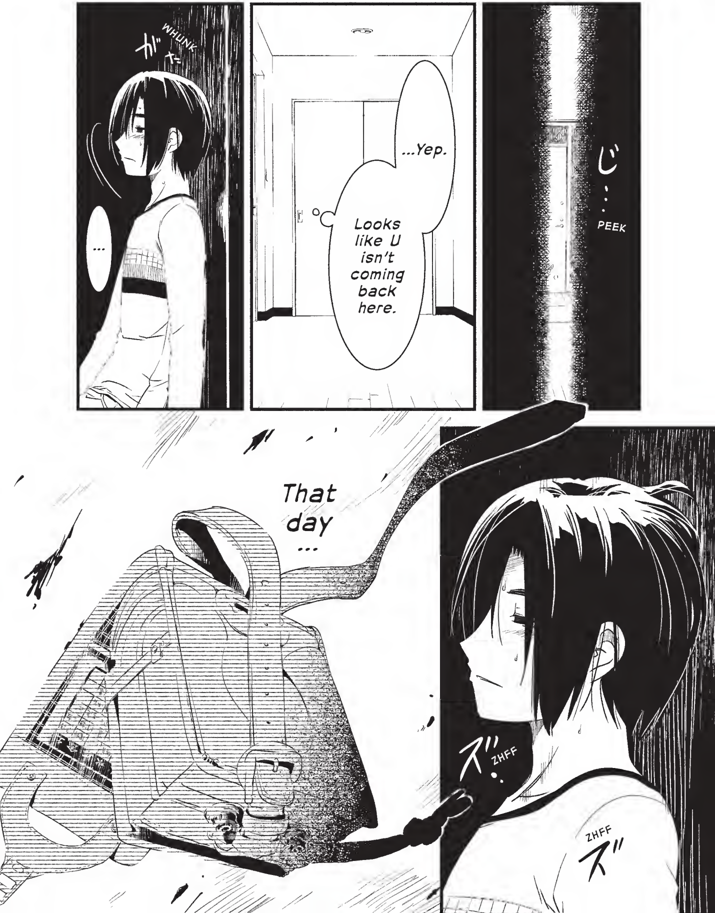
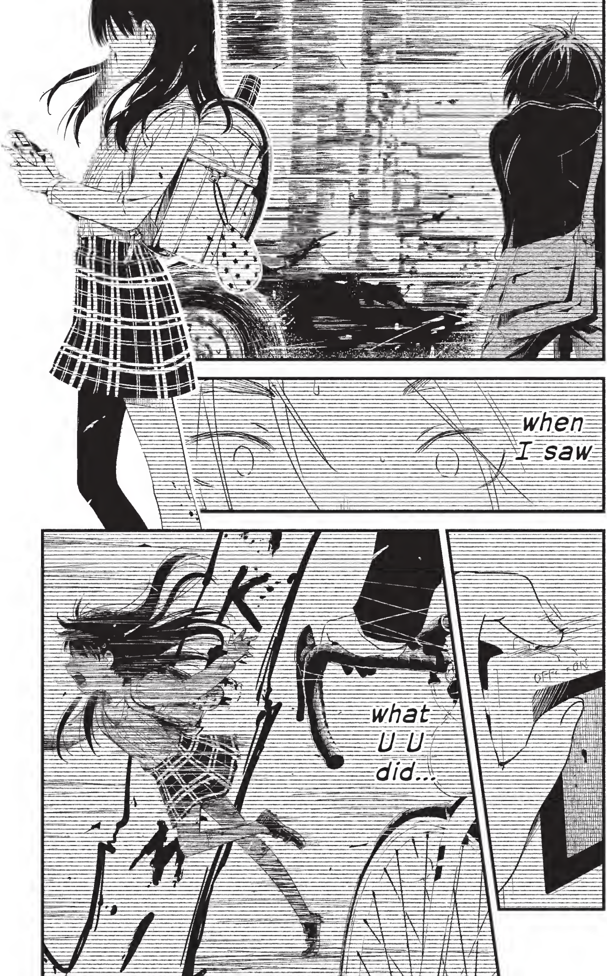

I was 20 then, and it was the period in my life when I read more mystery novels than any other time.
You could almost say that mystery novels were all I read then, though that would be an exaggeration.
I was at an age when I wanted to show off; not necessarily to others, but to myself.
I read more foreign mystery novels than Japanese ones.
I read so voraciously, that sadly, I barely remember any of the content of those books at all...

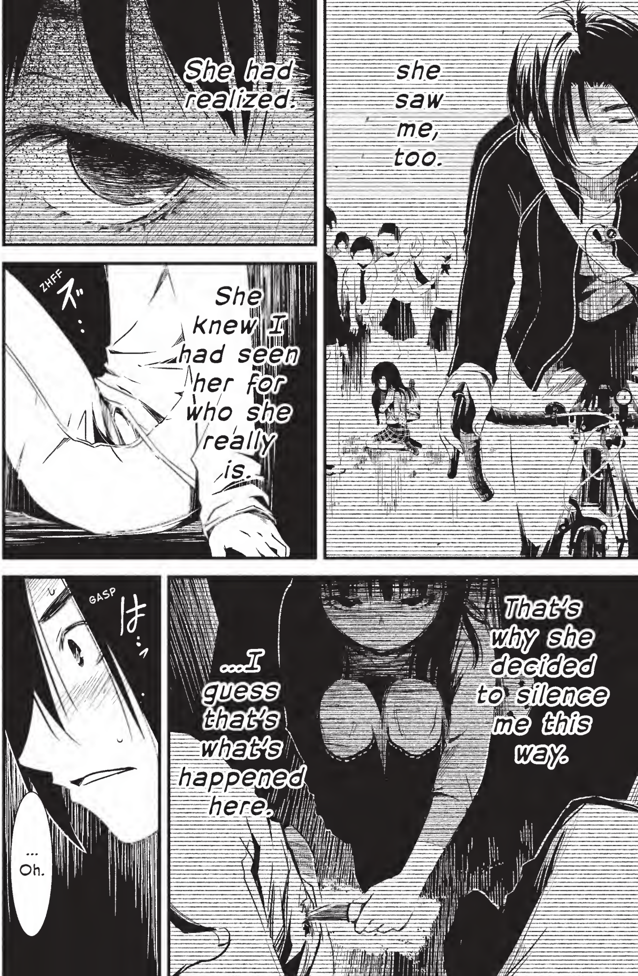

In any case,
there's an oft-seen method of murder in the world of mystery novels:
imprisoning the victim in a locked room—a safe, for example—until they suffocated.
Unlike more direct methods, such as beating someone or poisoning them, it requires no physical strength,
And it's also a method that leaves the killer with a lesser sense of guilt... at least, I think that's how I recall it being described.
But a part of me would always sneer when I read such books.
You can't lock someone up that easily in real life, I'd think.

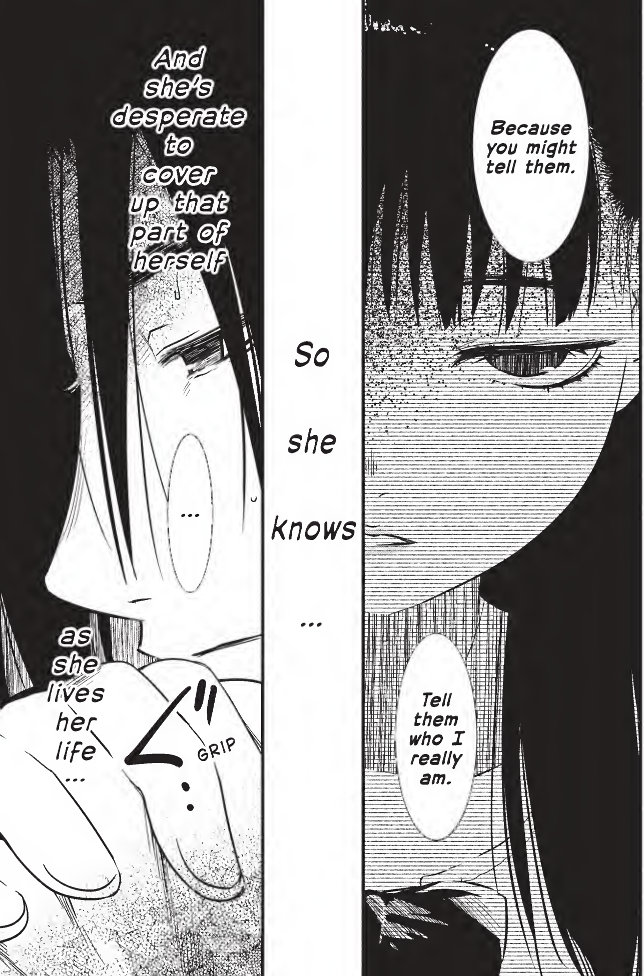

And now
I found myself getting locked up just that easily.
It almost felt like I was reaping what I'd sown.
...
監禁
Hour 1
of imprisonment.
一時間。

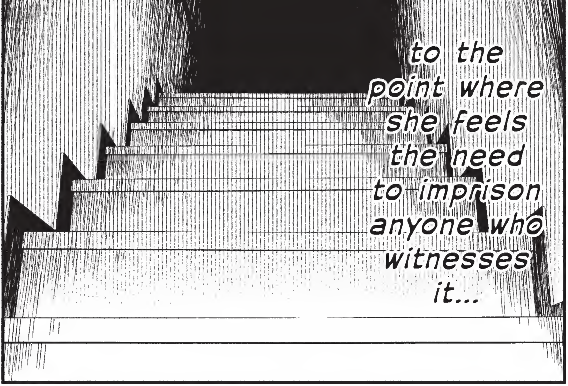

In less than an hour,
I swung countless times
between feelings of relief and feelings of anxiety...

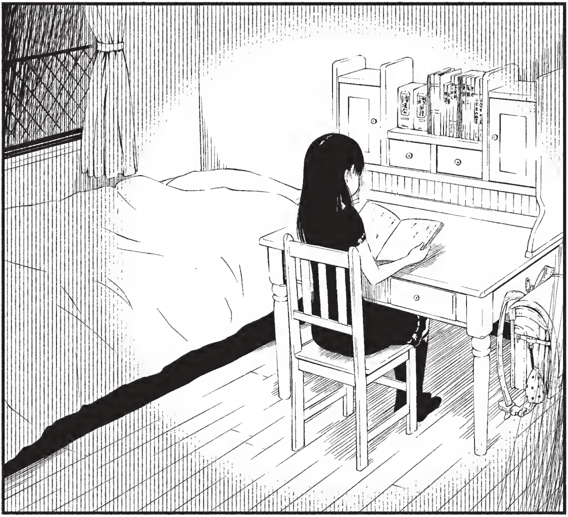

じ…
PEEK
...Yep.
Looks like U isn't coming back here.
ガチャ
WHUNK
...
ズ
ZHFF
ズ
ZHFF
That day ...

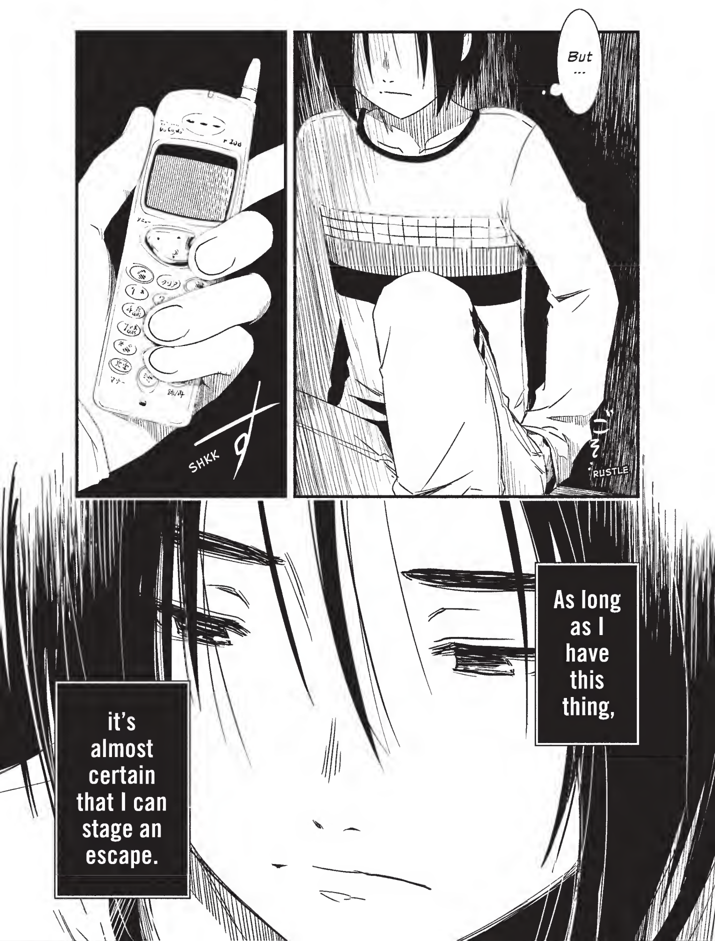

when I saw
K
what U U did...
OFF ON

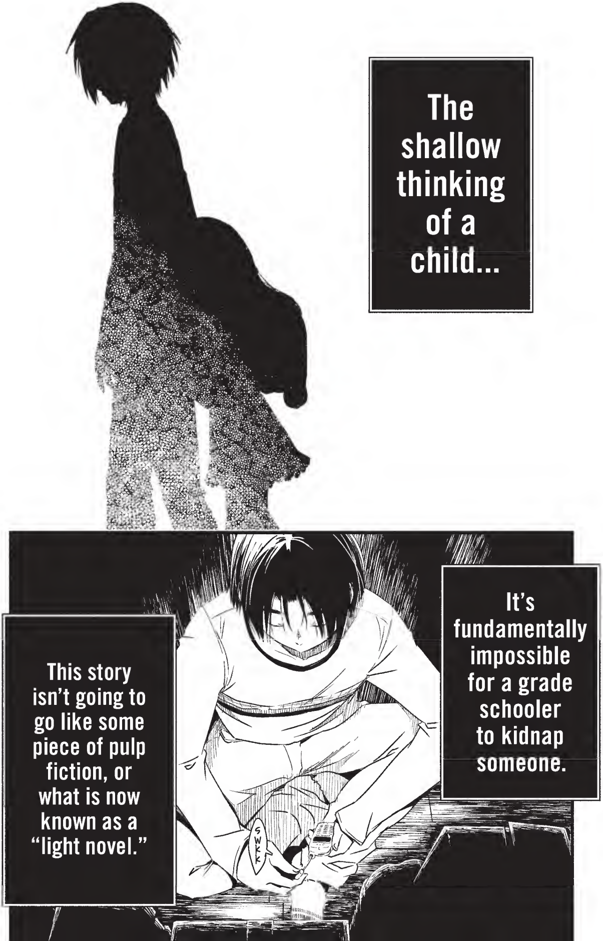

she saw me, too.
She had realized.
ZHFF
ズ…
She knew I had seen her for who she really is.
That's why she decided to silence me this way.
...I guess that's what's happened here.
GASP
は…
... Oh.

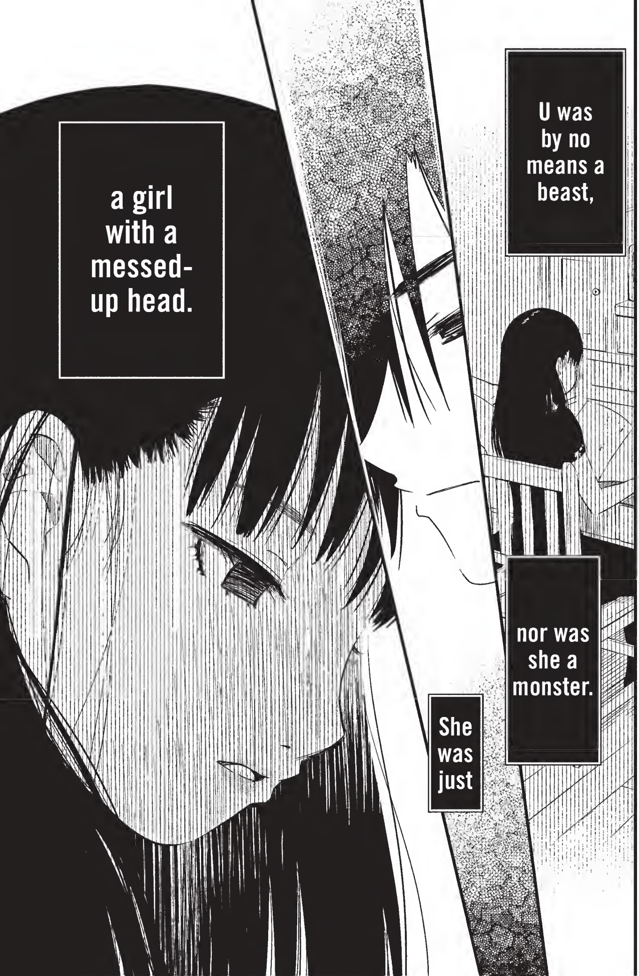

Because you might tell them.
Tell them who I really am.
So she knows...
And she's desperate to cover up that part of herself...
...
as she lives her life...
GRIP

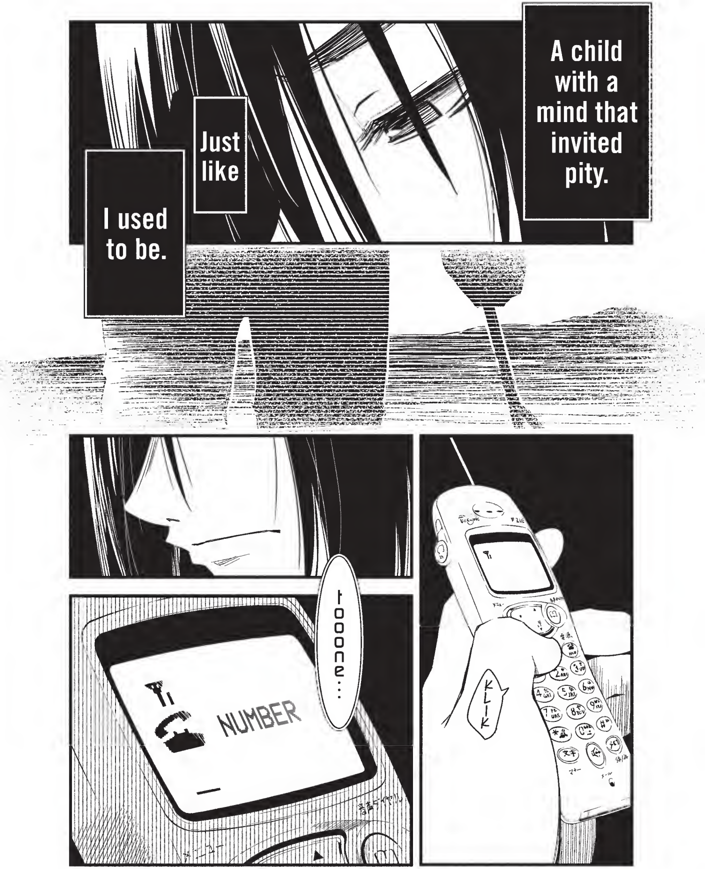

to the point where she feels the need to imprison anyone who witnesses it...

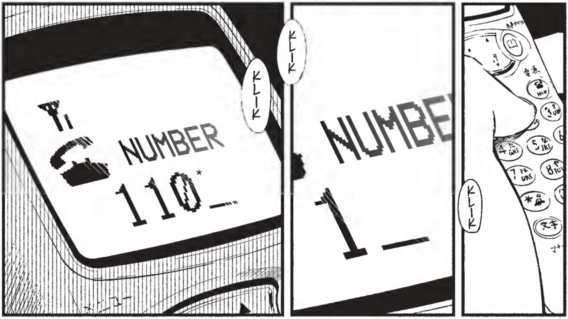



But ...
RUSTLE
SHKK
As long as I have this thing,
it's almost certain that I can stage an escape.

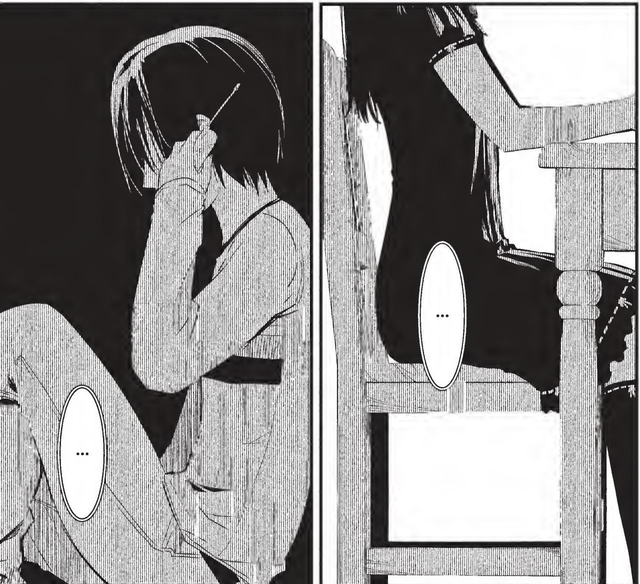

The shallow thinking of a child...
It's fundamentally impossible for a grade schooler to kidnap someone.
This story isn't going to go like some piece of pulp fiction, or what is now known as a "light novel."
SWKK

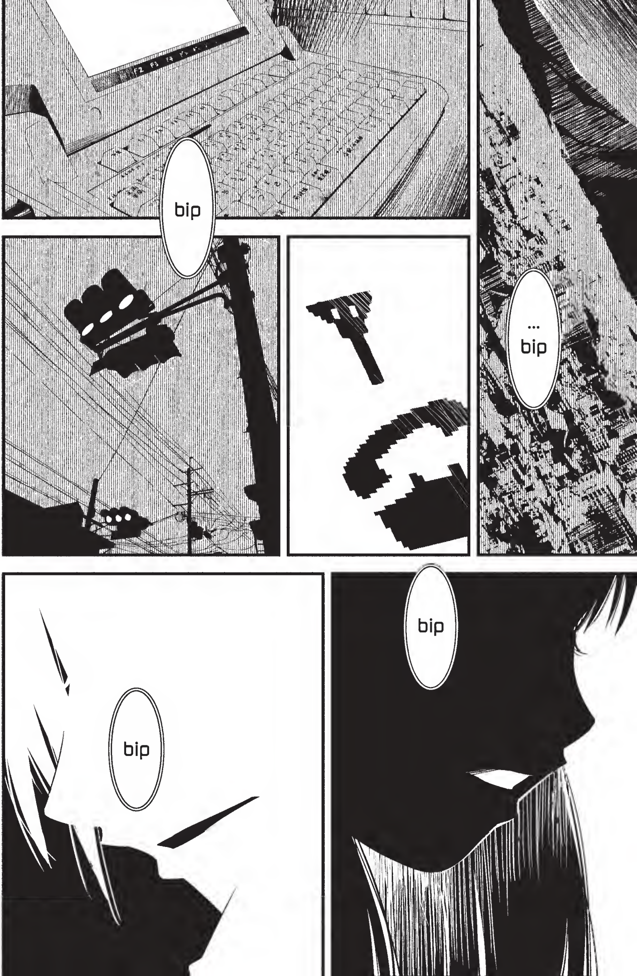

U was by no means a beast,
nor was she a monster.
She was just
a girl with a messed-up head.

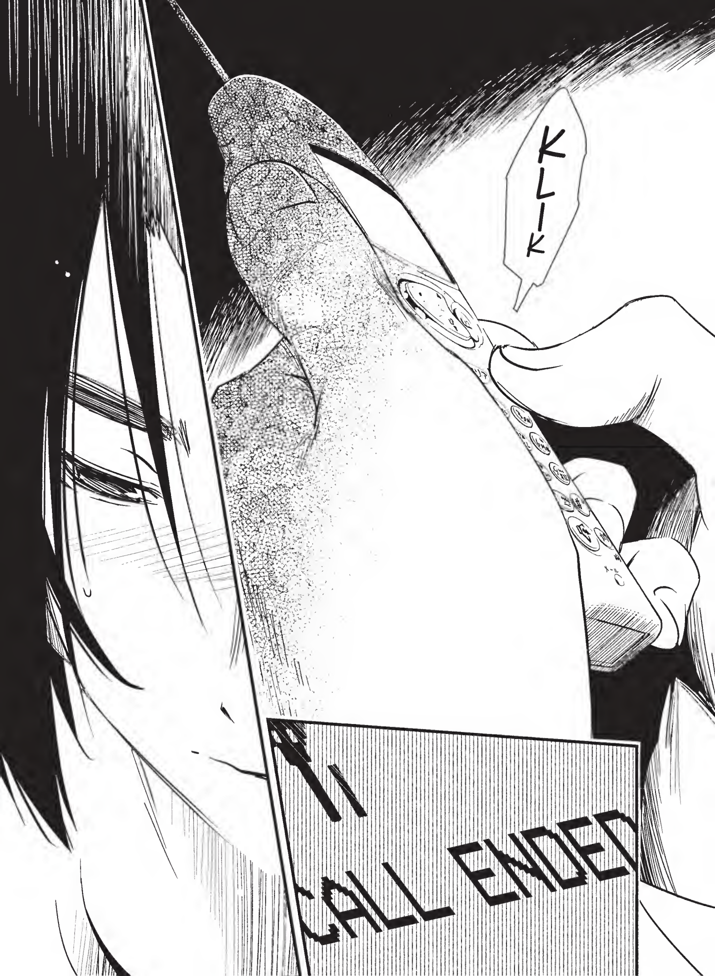

A child with a mind that invited pity.
Just like
I used to be.
KLIK
tooone...
NUMBER

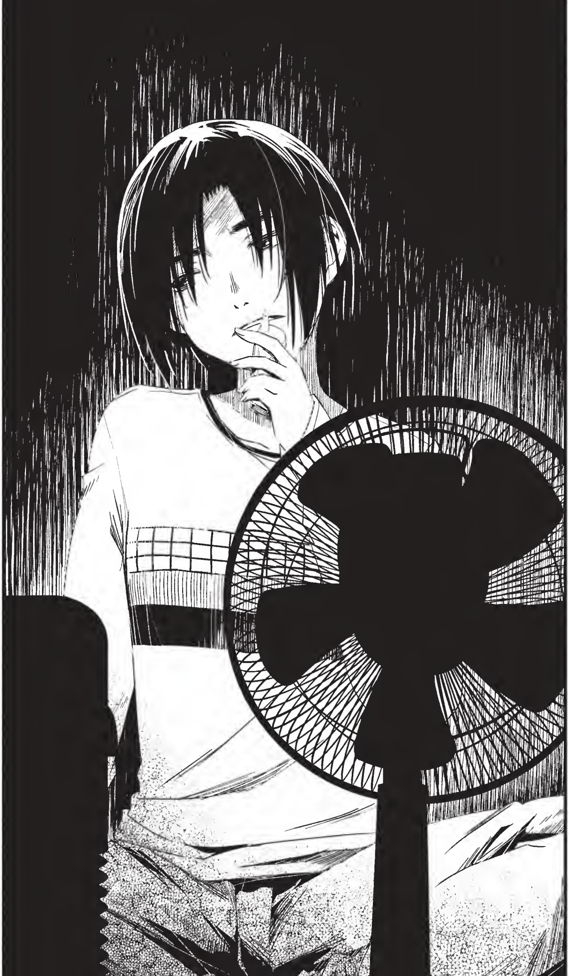

KLIK
NUMBE
1_
KLIK
KLIK
NUMBER
110*_

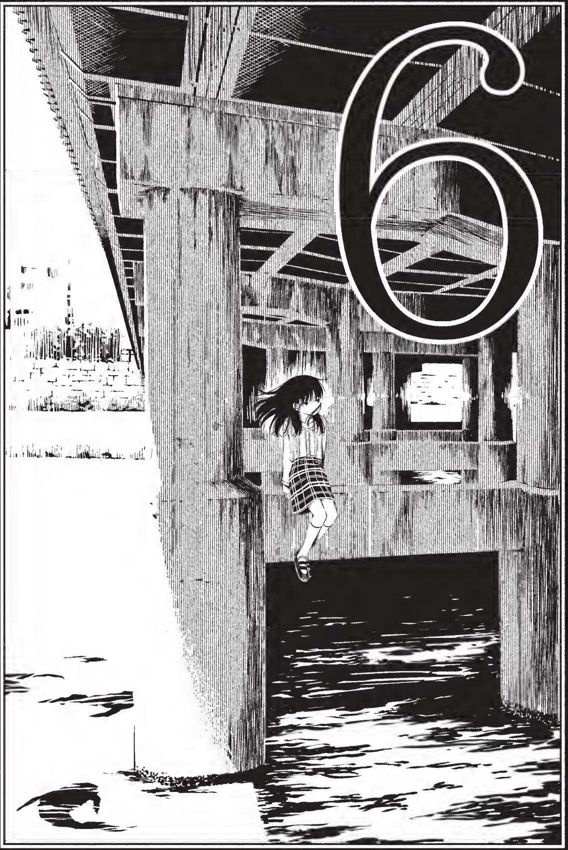
*110 (Police)

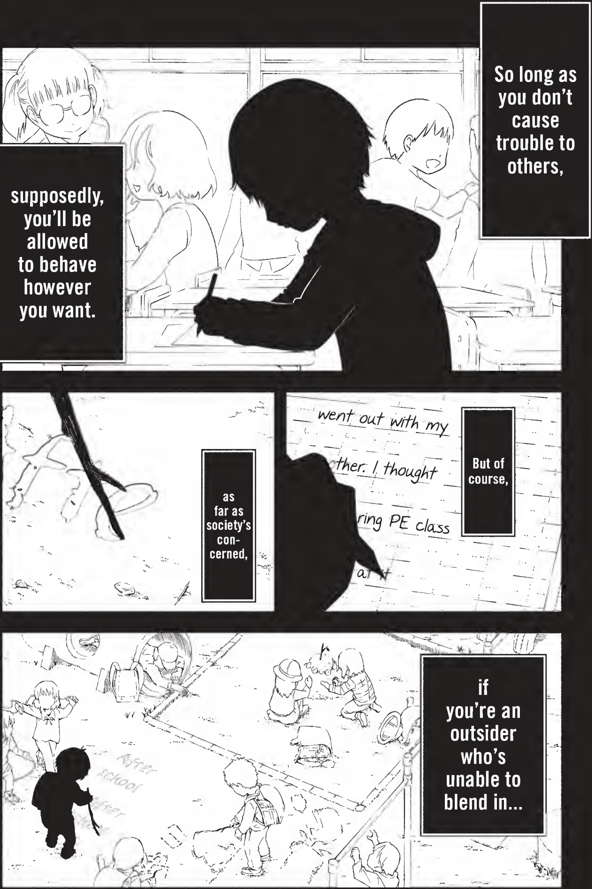


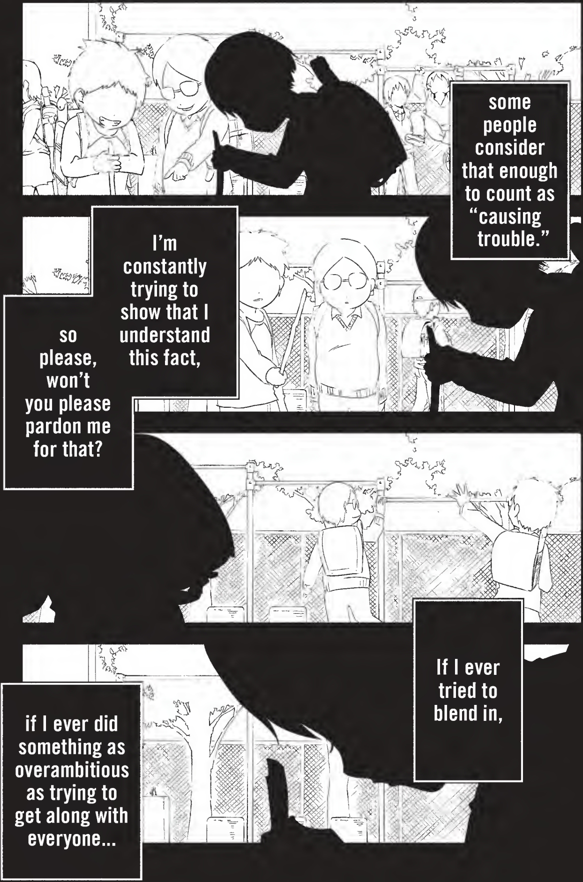

… bip
bip
bip
bip

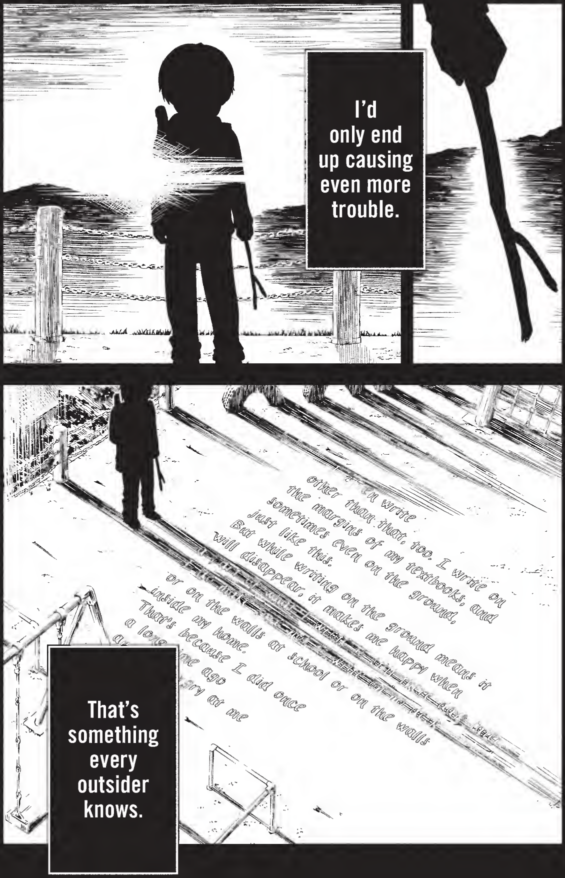

KLIK
CALL ENDED

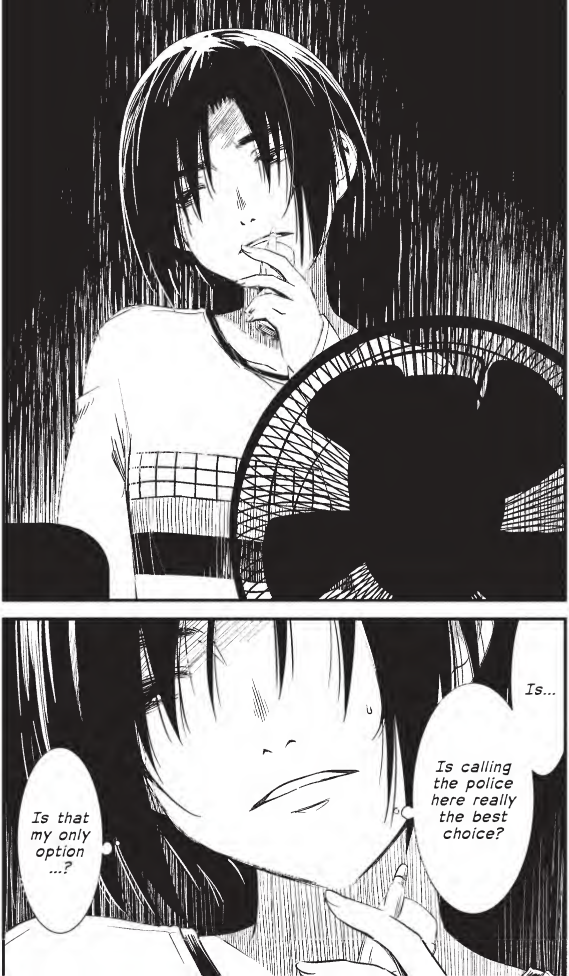


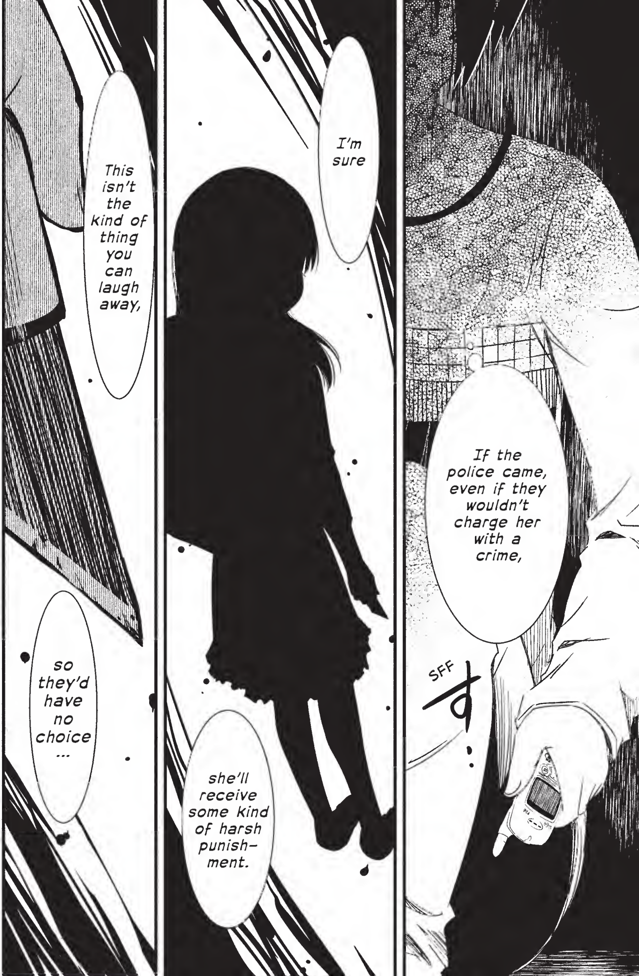

6

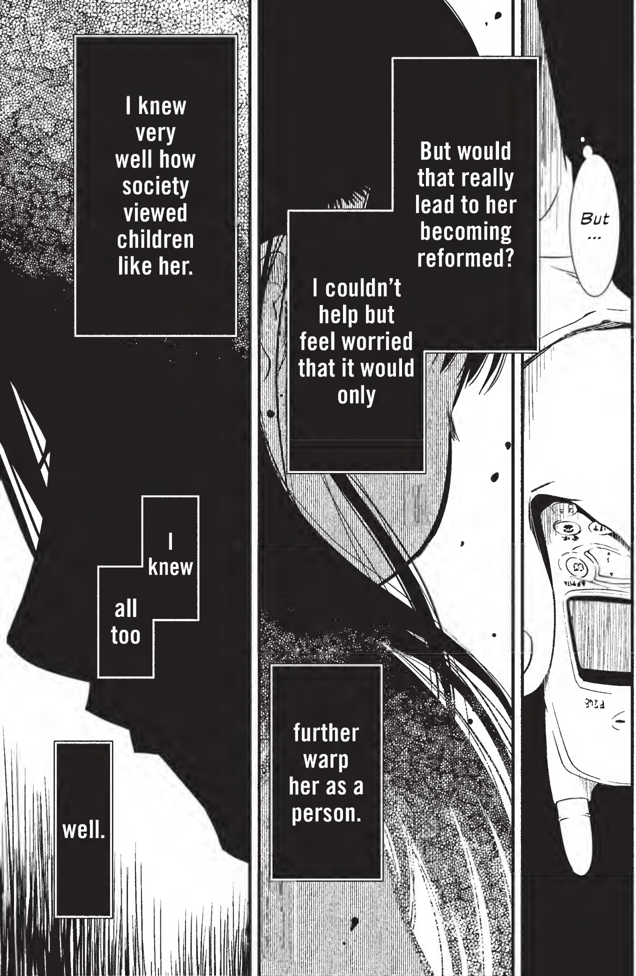

So long as you don't cause trouble to others,
supposedly, you'll be allowed to behave however you want.
But of course,
went out with my
ther. I thought
ring PE class
at it
as far as society's concerned,
if you're an outsider who's unable to blend in...
After school
After

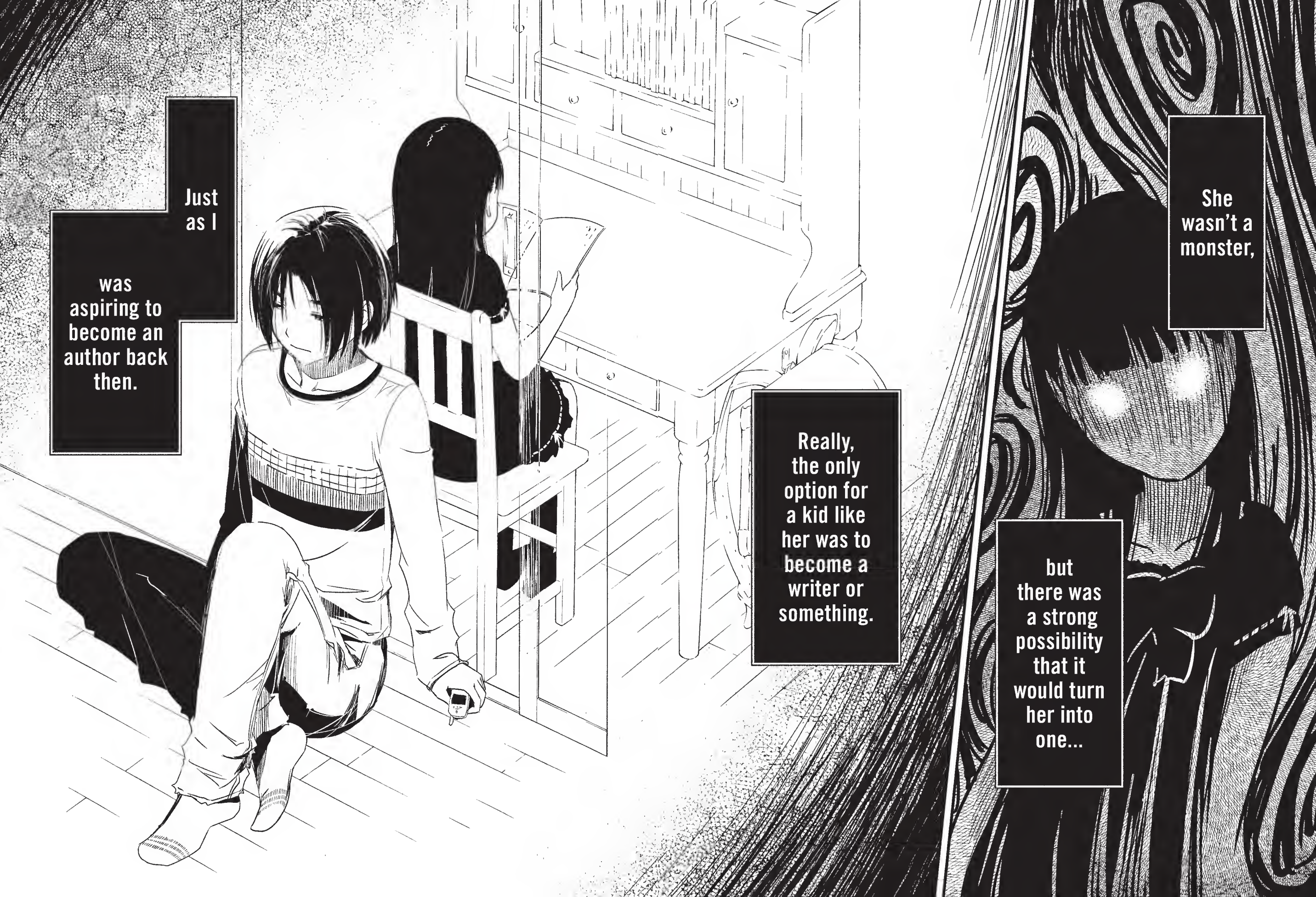

some people consider that enough to count as "causing trouble."
I'm constantly trying to show that I understand this fact,
so please, won't you please pardon me for that?
If I ever tried to blend in,
if I ever did something as overambitious as trying to get along with everyone...

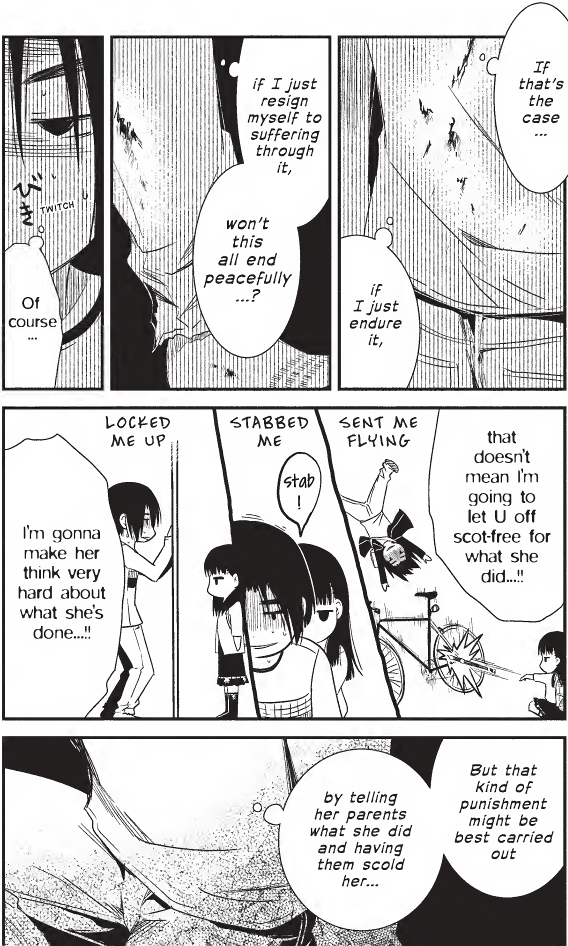

I'd only end up causing even more trouble.
n write
other than that, too. I write on
the margins of my textbooks, and
sometimes even on the ground,
just like this.
But while writing on the ground means it
will disappear, it makes me happy when
or on the walls at school or on the walls
inside my home.
That's because I did once
a lo me ago
a ry at me
That's something every outsider knows.

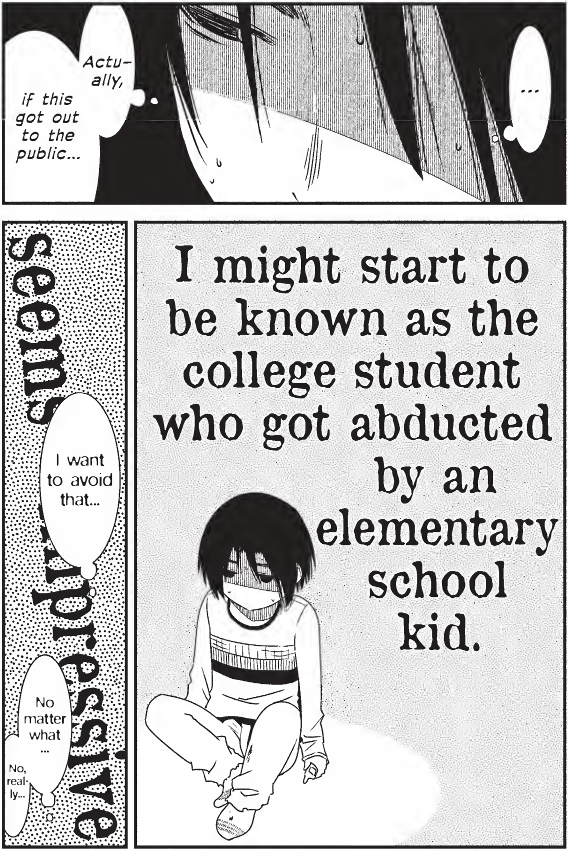

Is...
Is calling the police here really the best choice?
Is that my only option ...?

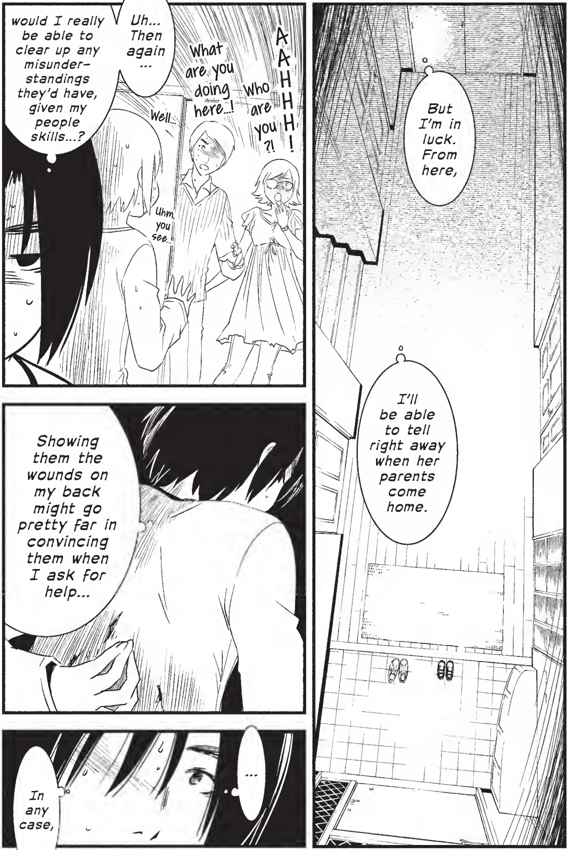

If the police came, even if they wouldn't charge her with a crime,
SFF
す
I'm sure
she'll receive some kind of harsh punishment.
This isn't the kind of thing you can laugh away,
so they'd have no choice ...

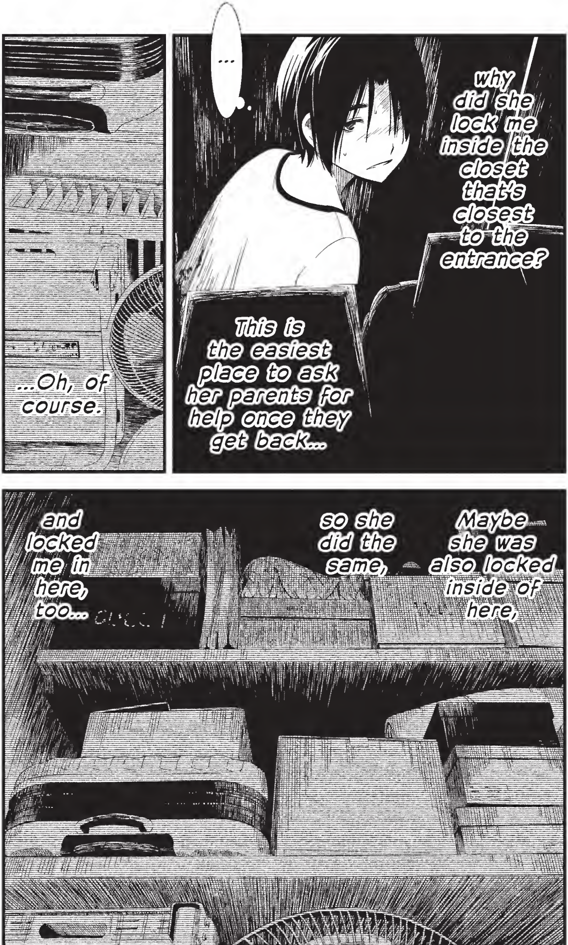

But…
But would that really lead to her becoming reformed?
I couldn't help but feel worried that it would only
further warp her as a person.
I knew very well how society viewed children like her.
I knew all too
well.

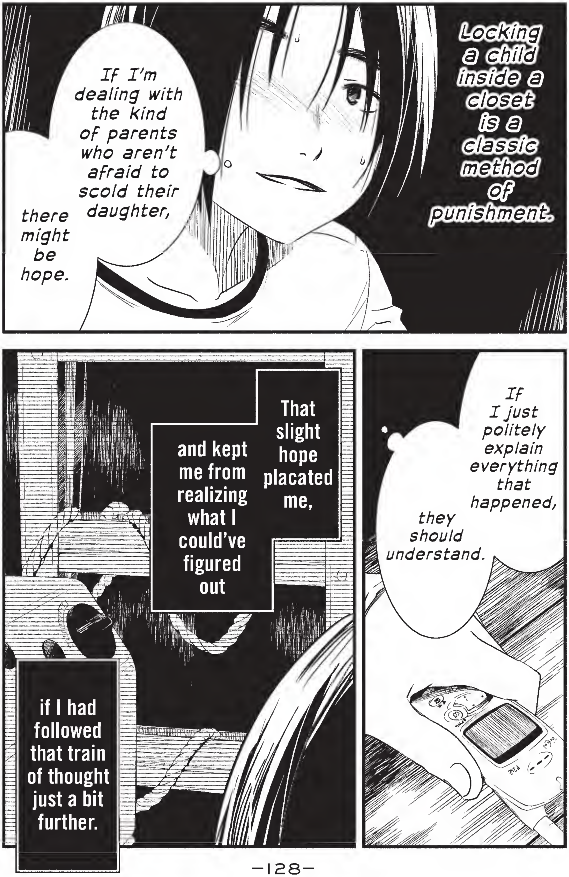

She wasn't a monster,
but there was a strong possibility that it would turn her into one...
Really, the only option for a kid like her was to become a writer or something.
Just as I was aspiring to become an author back then.

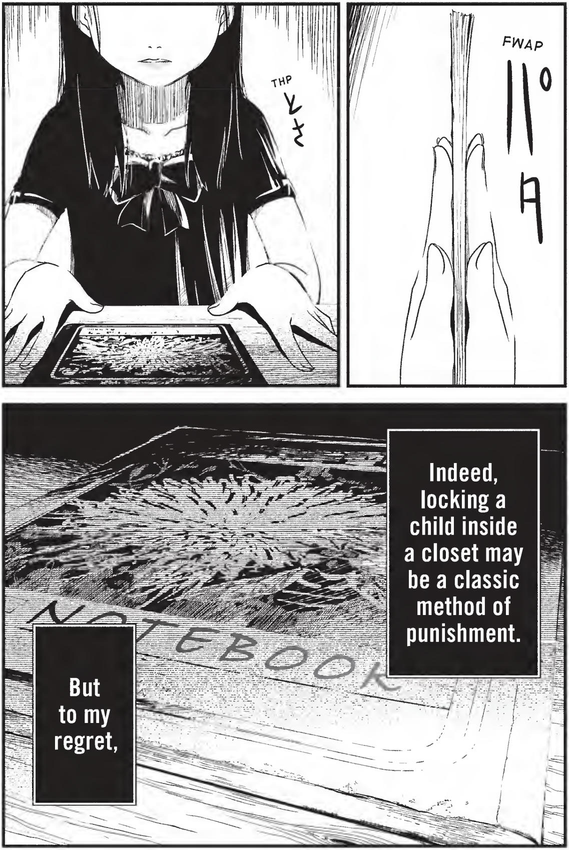

If that's the case ...
if I just endure it,
if I just resign myself to suffering through it,
won't this all end peacefully ...?
ぴき
TWITCH
Of course ...
that doesn't mean I'm going to let U off scot-free for what she did...!!
SENT ME FLYING
STABBED ME
stab !
LOCKED ME UP
I'm gonna make her think very hard about what she's done...!!
But that kind of punishment might be best carried out
by telling her parents what she did and having them scold her...

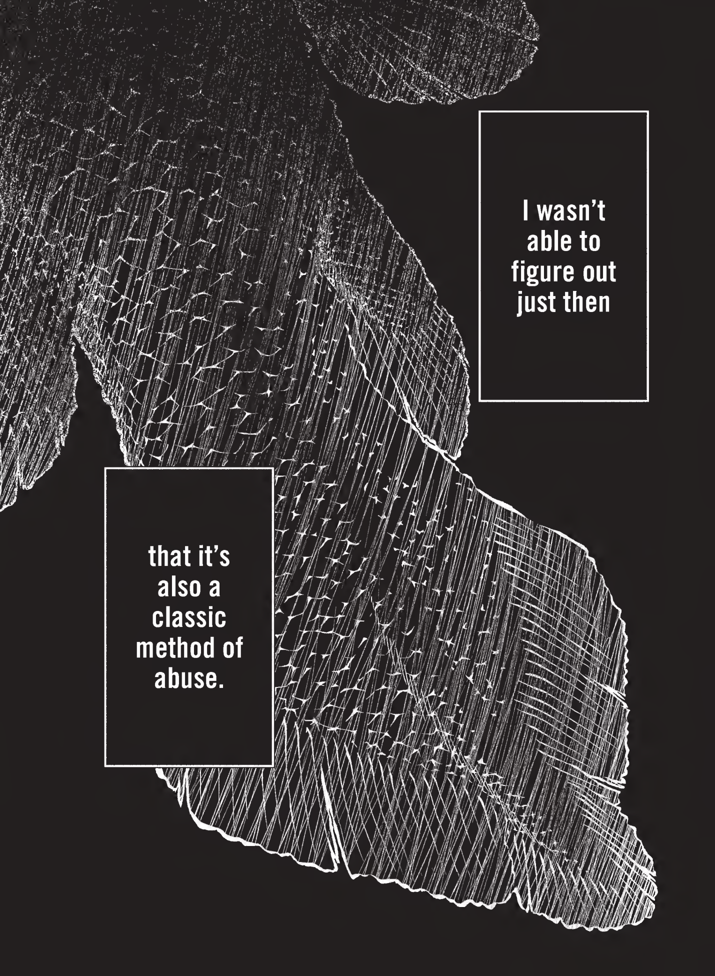

...
Actually, if this got out to the public...
I might start to be known as the college student who got abducted by an elementary school kid.
seems impressive
I want to avoid that...
No matter what...
No, really...


AAHHHH!
Who are you ?!
What are you doing here..!
Well...
Uhm, you see...
Uh... Then again ...
would I really be able to clear up any misunderstandings they'd have, given my people skills...?
Showing them the wounds on my back might go pretty far in convincing them when I ask for help...
...
In any case,
But I'm in luck. From here,
I'll be able to tell right away when her parents come home.

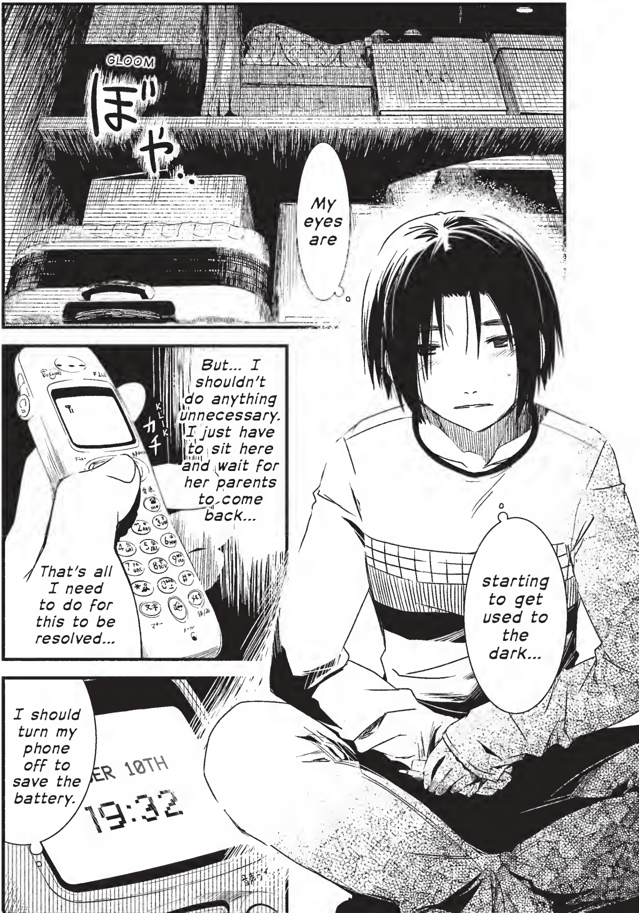

...
why did she lock me inside the closet that's closest to the entrance?
This is the easiest place to ask her parents for help once they get back...
...Oh, of course.
Maybe she was also locked inside of here,
so she did the same,
and locked me in here, too...

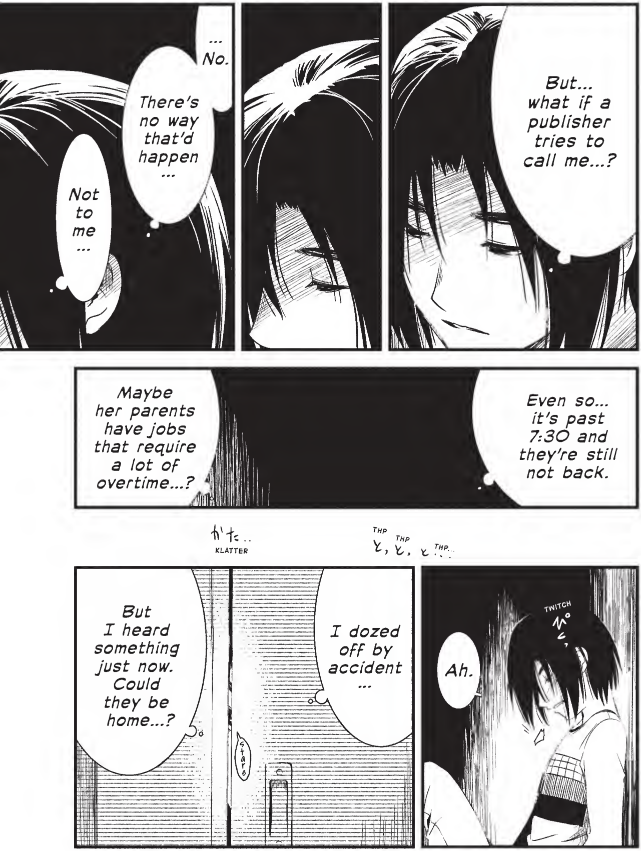

Locking a child inside a closet is a classic method of punishment.
If I'm dealing with the kind of parents who aren't afraid to scold their daughter, there might be hope.
If I just politely explain everything that happened, they should understand.
That slight hope placated me,
and kept me from realizing what I could've figured out
if I had followed that train of thought just a bit further.

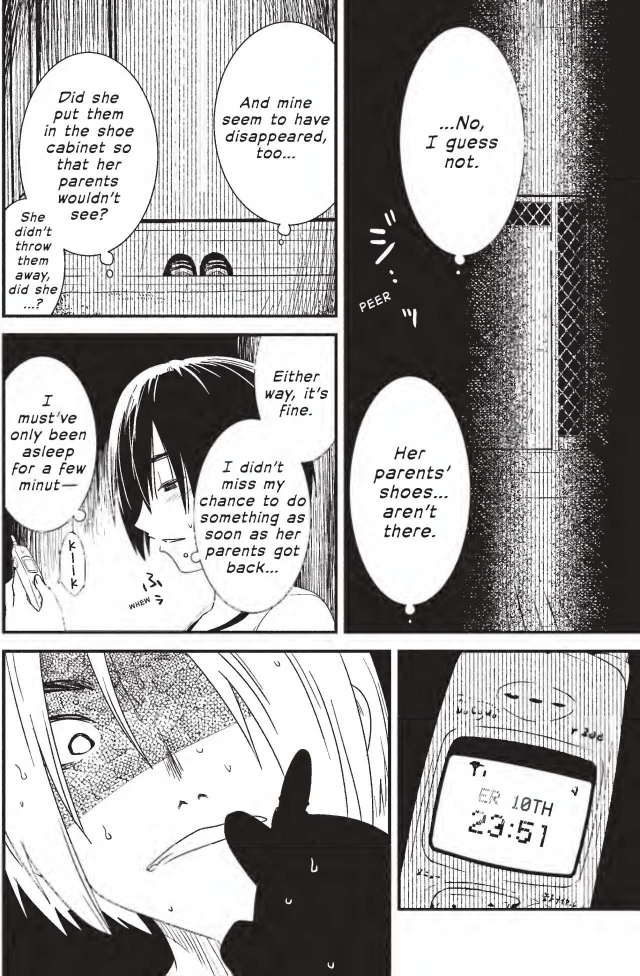

FWAP
パタ
THP
どさ
Indeed, locking a child inside a closet may be a classic method of punishment.
But to my regret,
NOTEBOOK

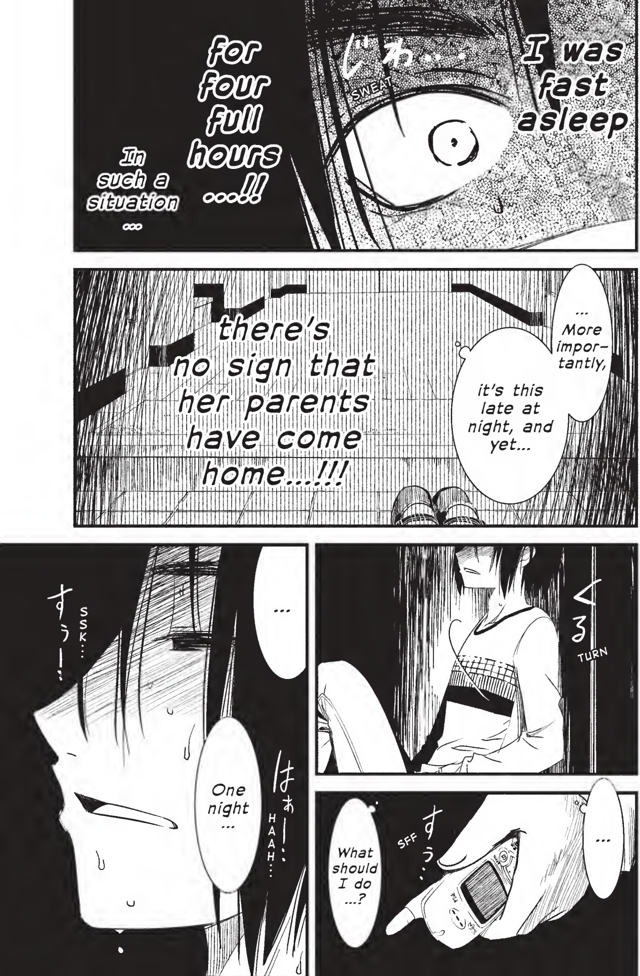

I wasn't able to figure out just then
that it's also a classic method of abuse.

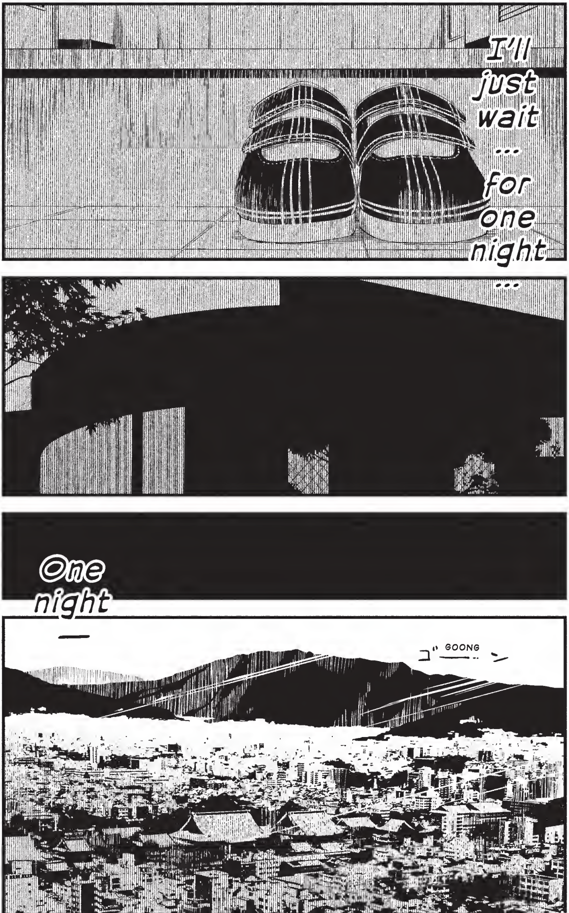
7


GLOOM
ぼや…
My eyes are
starting to get used to the dark...
KLIK
カチ
But... I shouldn't do anything unnecessary. I just have to sit here and wait for her parents to come back...
That's all I need to do for this to be resolved...
ER 10TH
19:32
I should turn my phone off to save the battery.

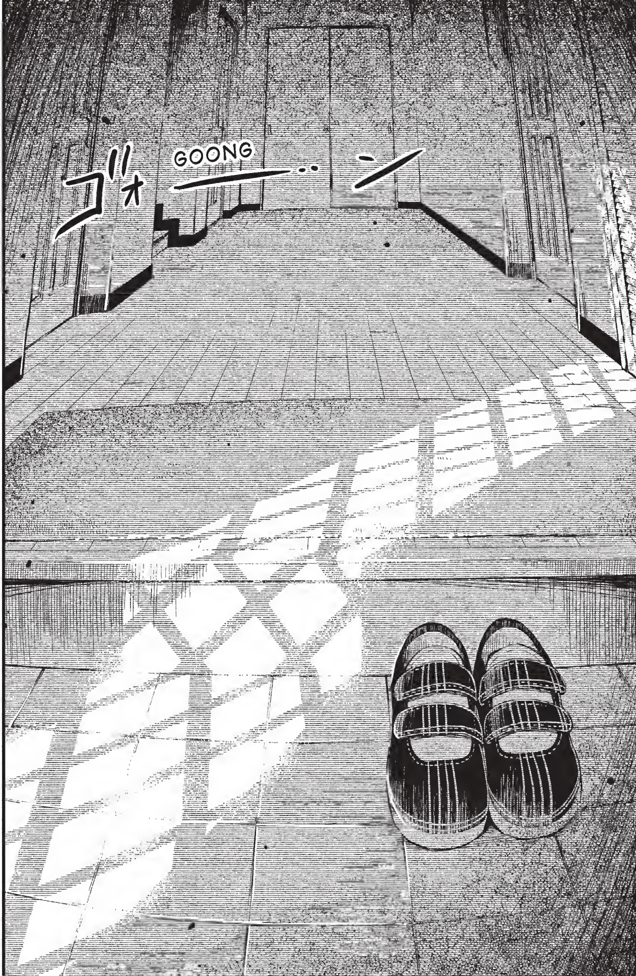

But... what if a publisher tries to call me...?
... No.
There's no way that'd happen ...
Not to me ...
Even so... it's past 7:30 and they're still not back.
Maybe her parents have jobs that require a lot of overtime...?
と、と、と...
THP THP THP...
かた..
KLATTER
ぴく,
TWITCH
Ah.
I dozed off by accident ...
But I heard something just now. Could they be home...?
stare

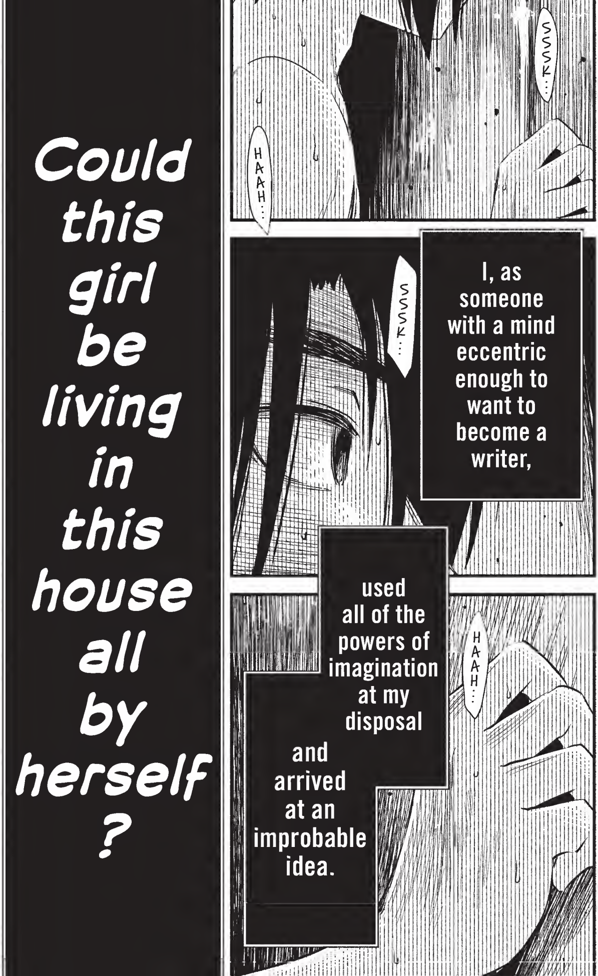

...No, I guess not.
PEER
Her parents' shoes... aren't there.
And mine seem to have disappeared, too...
Did she put them in the shoe cabinet so that her parents wouldn't see?
She didn't throw them away, did she ...?
Either way, it's fine.
I didn't miss my chance to do something as soon as her parents got back...
I must've only been asleep for a few minut—
KLIK
WHEW
ER 10TH
23:51

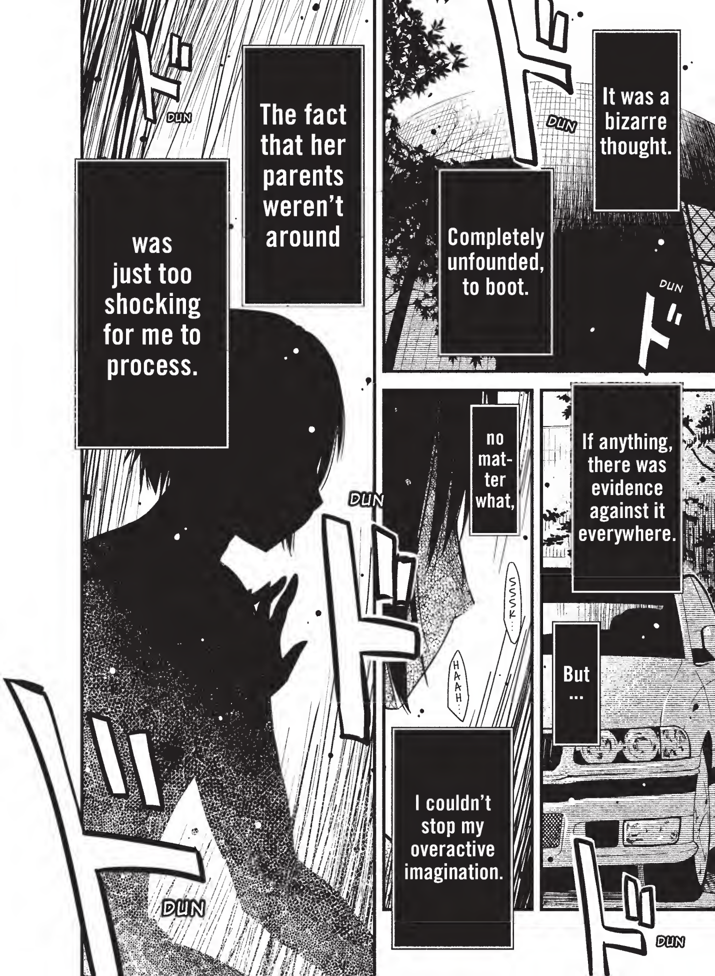

I was fast asleep
じわ…
SWEAT
for four full hours …!!
In such a situation …
… More importantly,
it's this late at night, and yet…
there's no sign that her parents have come home…!!!
くる
TURN
…
すぅ…
SFF
What should I do …?
…
すぅー…
SSK…
はぁー…
HAAH…
One night …

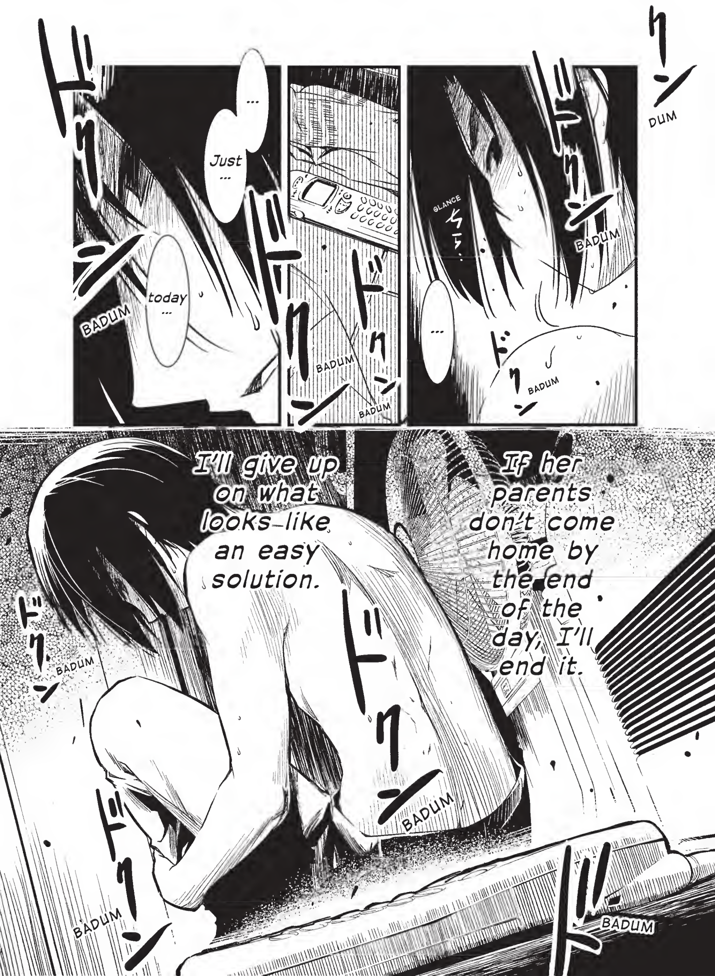

I'll just wait ... for one night ...
One night —
ゴ GOONG ン

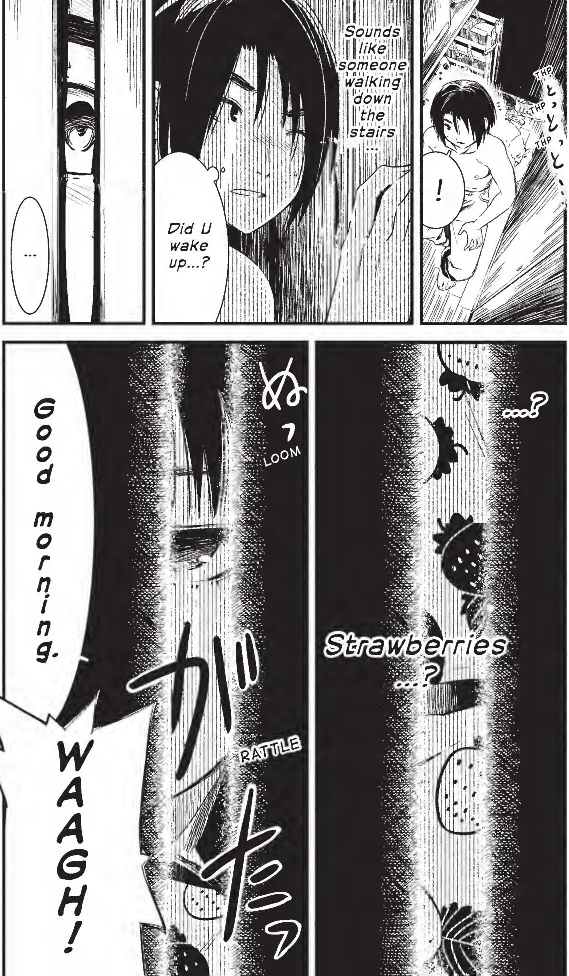
ゴォー…ン
GOONG
ゴー…ン
GOONG

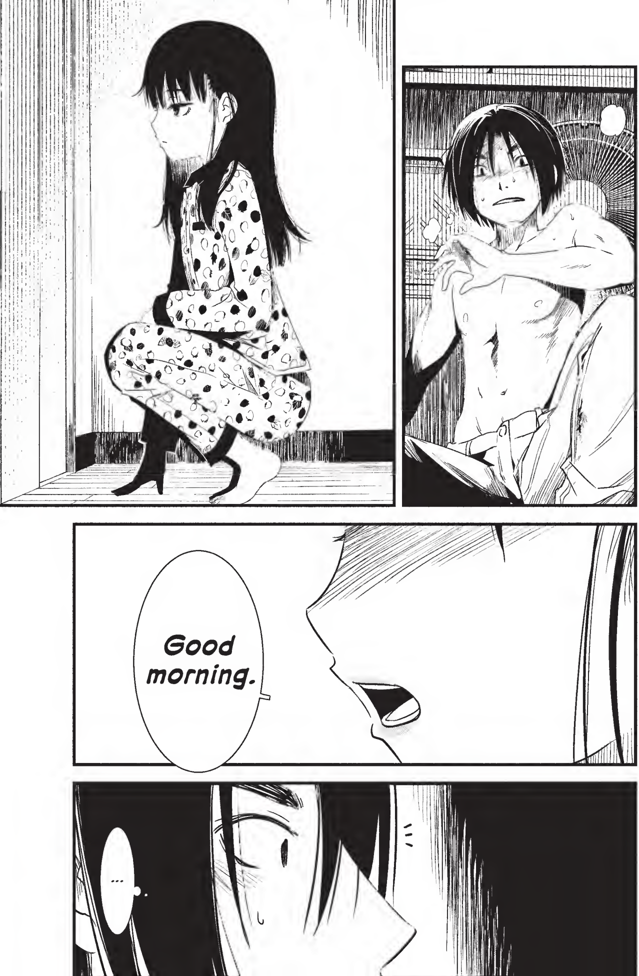

ゴォ
GOONG
ー…ン

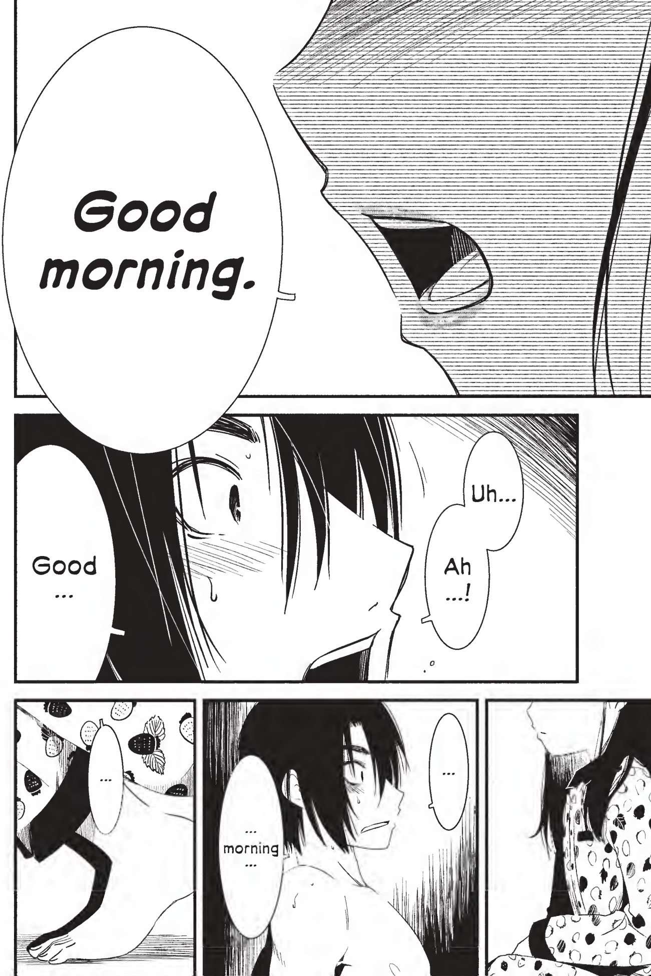

SSSK…
HAAH…
SSSK…
I, as someone with a mind eccentric enough to want to become a writer,
used all of the powers of imagination at my disposal
HAAH…
and arrived at an improbable idea.
Could this girl be living in this house all by herself?

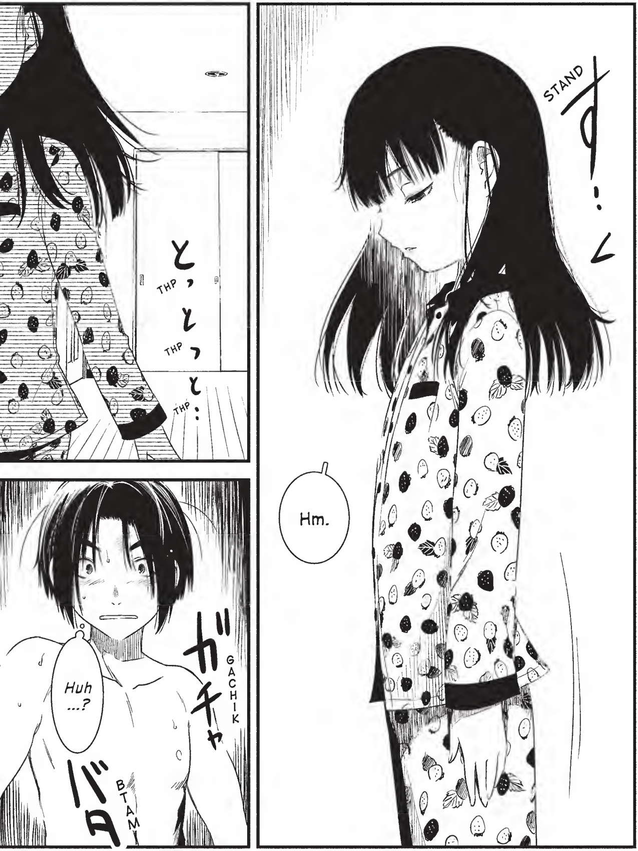

It was a bizarre thought.
DUN
Completely unfounded, to boot.
DUN
If anything, there was evidence against it everywhere.
But…
DUN
no matter what,
SSSK…
HAAH…
I couldn't stop my overactive imagination.
The fact that her parents weren't around
DUN
was just too shocking for me to process.
DUN
DUN

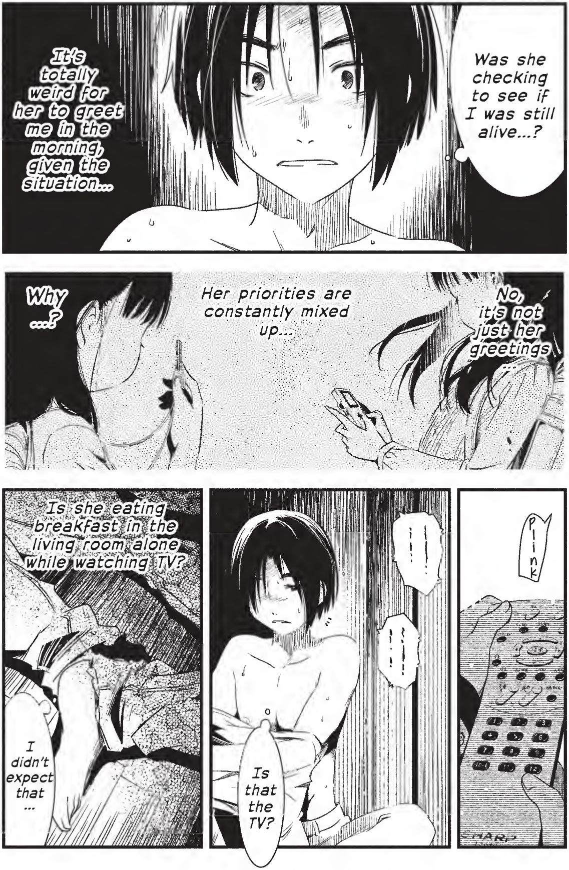

クン
DUM
ドクン
BADUM
GLANCE
...
ドクン
BADUM
ドクン
BADUM
ドクン
BADUM
...
Just ...
today ...
ドクン
BADUM
If her parents don't come home by the end of the day, I'll end it.
I'll give up on what looks like an easy solution.
ドクン
BADUM
ドクン
BADUM
ドクン
BADUM
ドクン
BADUM

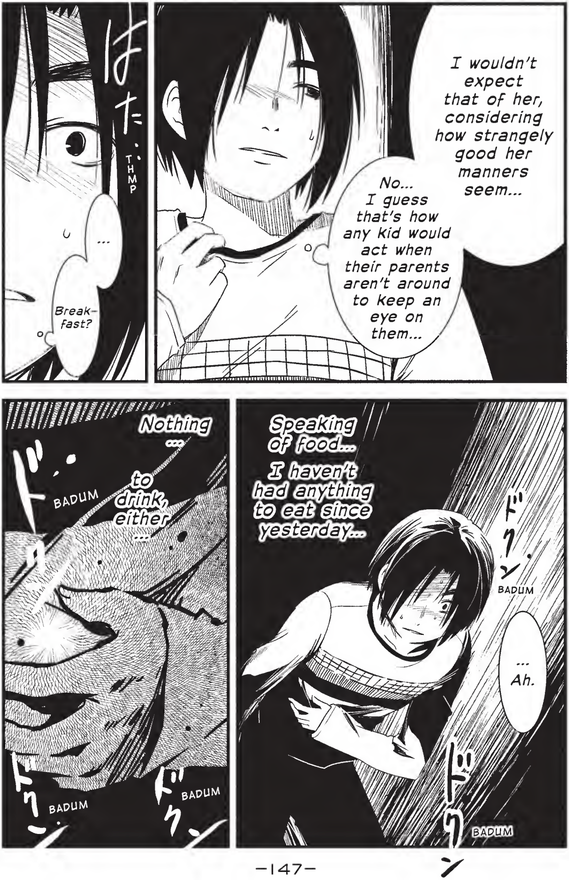

THP
THP
THP
とっとっと
!
Sounds like someone walking down the stairs…
Did U wake up…?
…
…?
Strawberries …?
ぬっ
LOOM
ガザッ
RATTLE
Good morning.
WAAAGH!

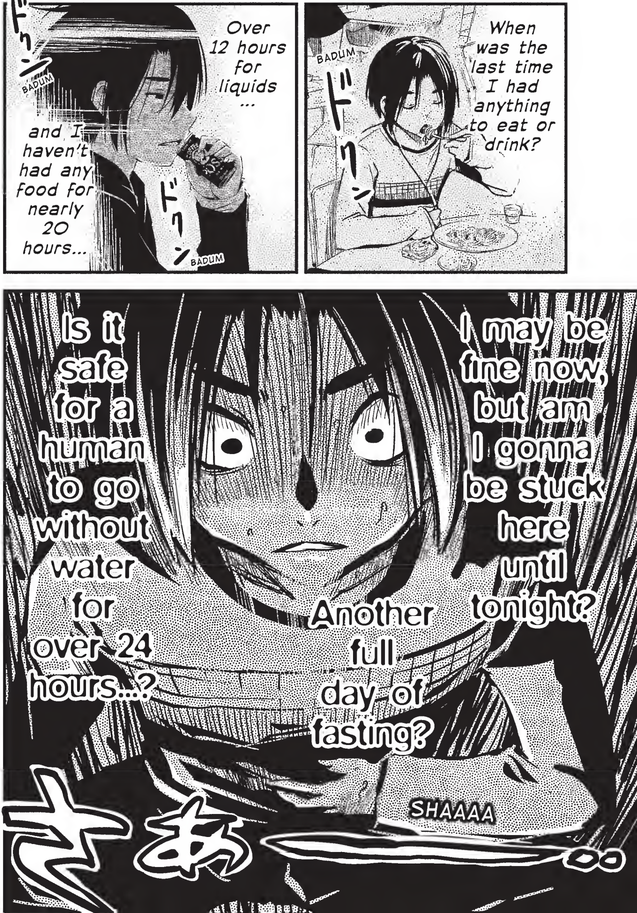

Good morning.
...

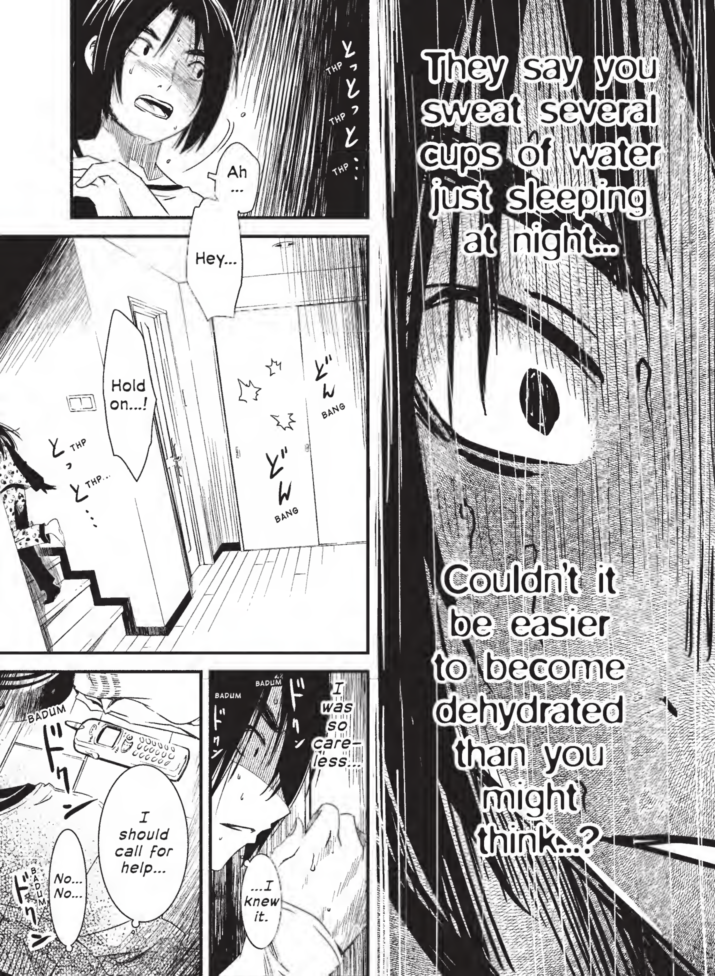

Good morning.
Uh...
Ah ...!
Good ...
...
... morning ...
...

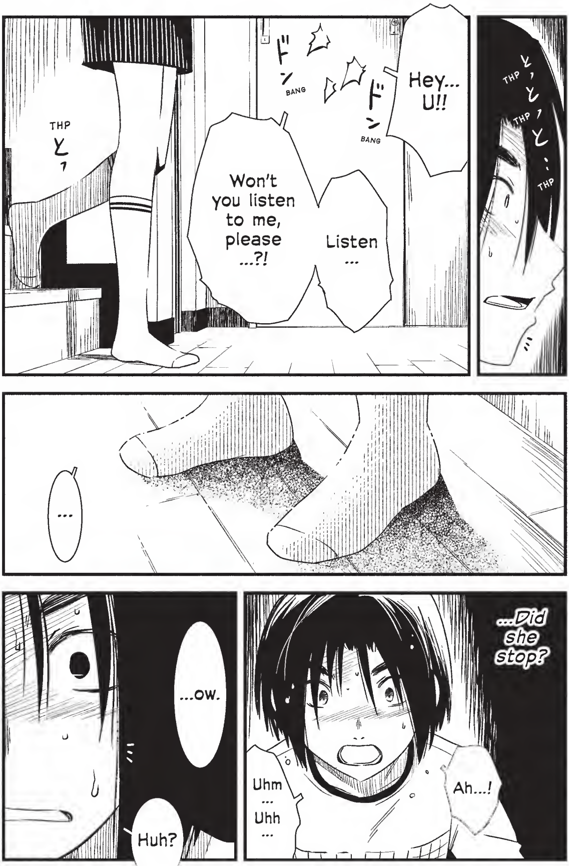

すっ…く
STAND
Hm.
と、とっ とっ…
THP
THP
THP
Huh …?
ガチャ
GACHIK
バタン
BTAM

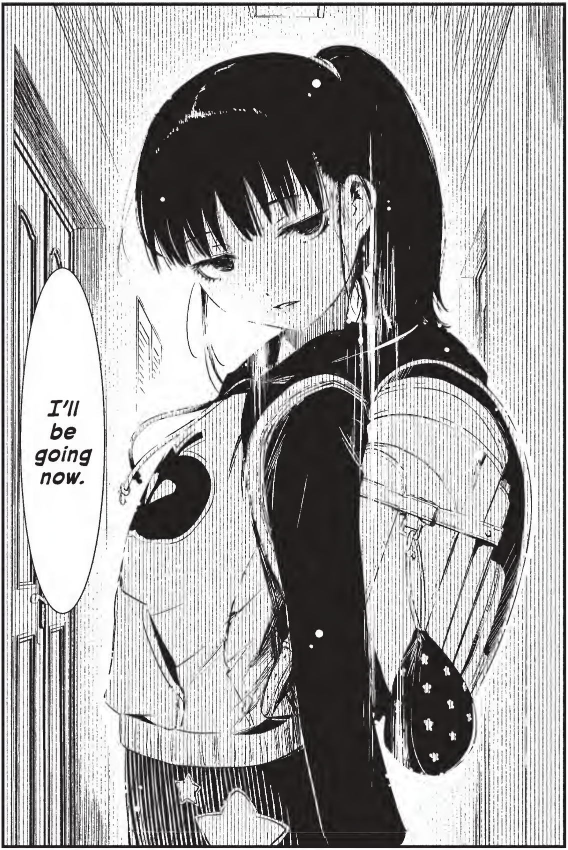

Was she checking to see if I was still alive...?
It's totally weird for her to greet me in the morning, given the situation...
No, it's not just her greetings...
Her priorities are constantly mixed up...
Why...?
Plink
...!!
...!?
Is that the TV?
SHARP
Is she eating breakfast in the living room alone while watching TV?
I didn't expect that...

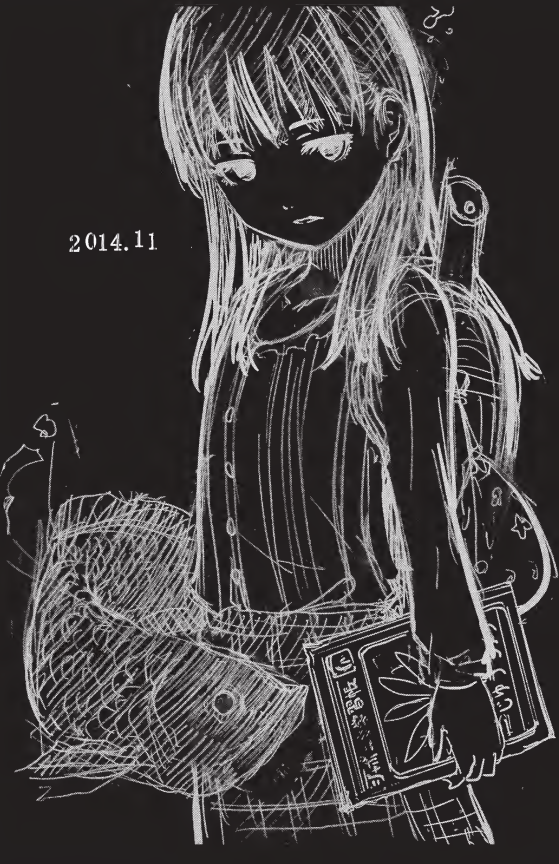

I wouldn't expect that of her, considering how strangely good her manners seem...
No... I guess that's how any kid would act when their parents aren't around to keep an eye on them...
はた THMP
...
Breakfast?
Speaking of food... I haven't had anything to eat since yesterday...
ドクン BADUM
... Ah.
ドクン BADUM
Nothing... to drink, either...
ドクン BADUM
ドクン BADUM
ドクン BADUM


When was the last time I had anything to eat or drink?
BADUM
ドクン
Over 12 hours for liquids ...
ドクン
BADUM
and I haven't had any food for nearly 20 hours...
ドクン
BADUM
I may be fine now, but am I gonna be stuck here until tonight?
Another full day of fasting?
Is it safe for a human to go without water for over 24 hours...?
さあーっ
SHAAAA

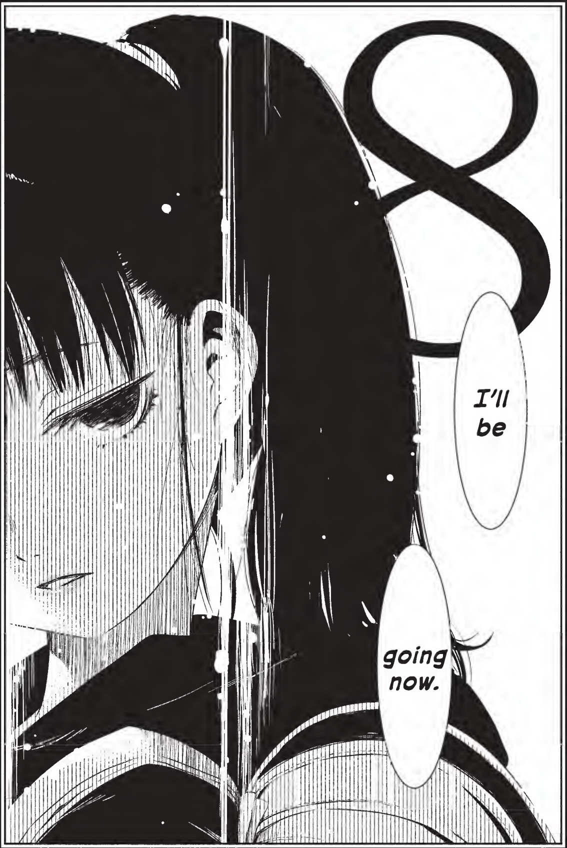

They say you sweat several cups of water just sleeping at night...
Couldn't it be easier to become dehydrated than you might think...?
とっ THP
とっ THP
と THP...
Ah...
Hey...
Hold on...!
どん BANG
どん BANG
とっ THP
と THP...
ドクン BADUM
ドクン BADUM
I was so careless...
...I knew it.
ドクン BADUM
I should call for help...
No... No...
ドクン BADUM

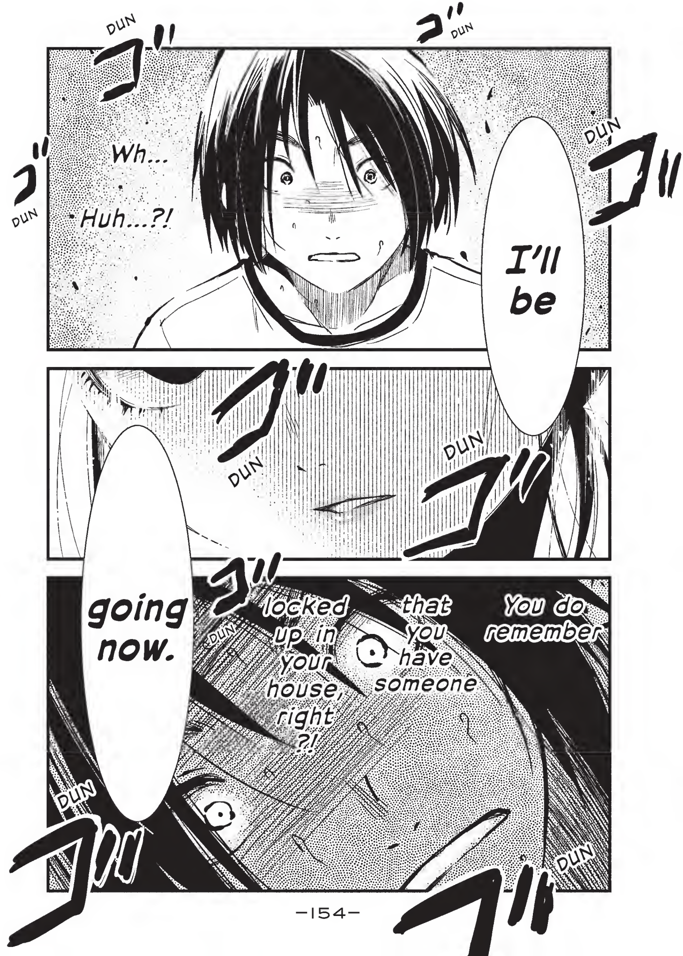

THP と、
THP と、
と‥
THP
Hey... U!!
ドン
BANG
ドン
BANG
Listen ...
Won't you listen to me, please ...?!
THP
と、
...
...Did she stop?
Ah...!
Uhm ... Uhh ...
...ow.
Huh?

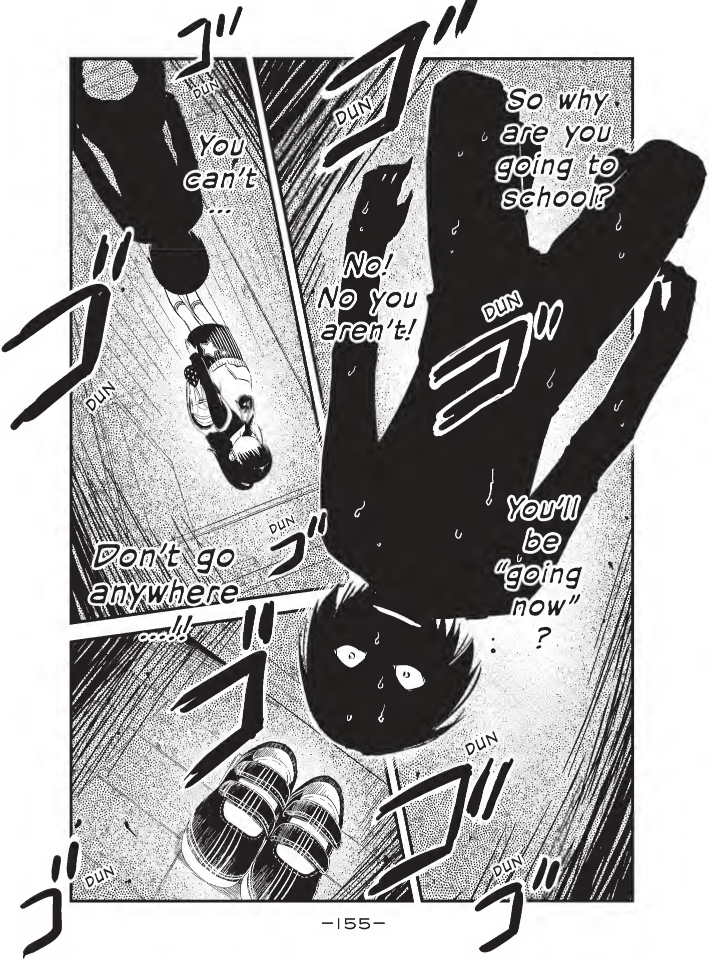

I'll be going now.

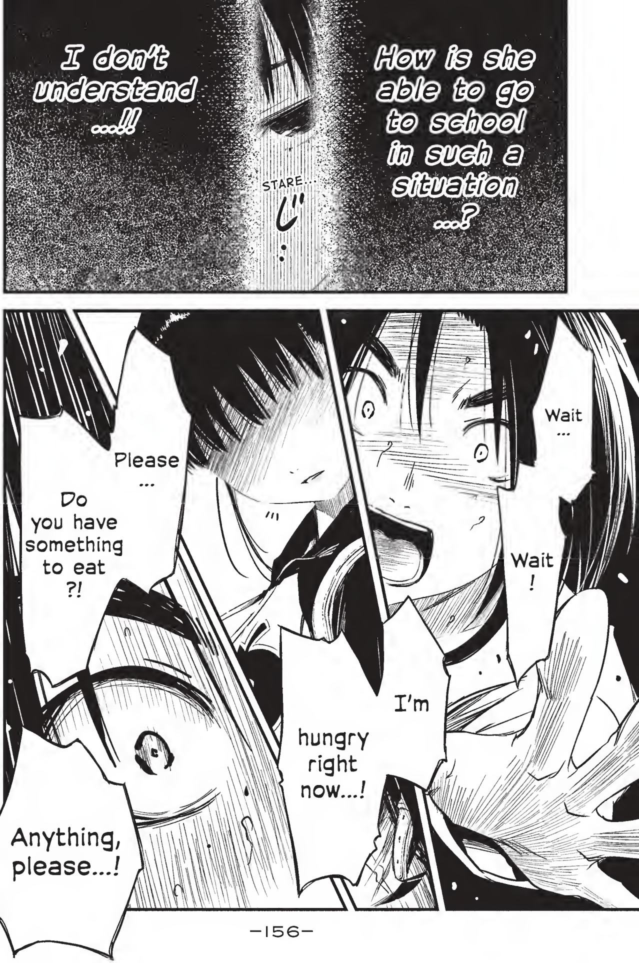


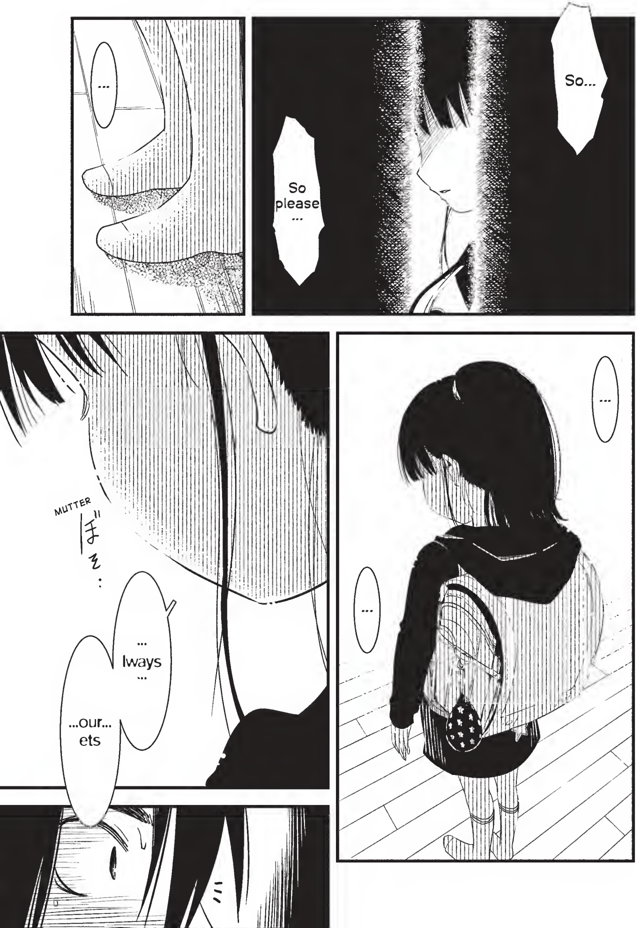
2014.11

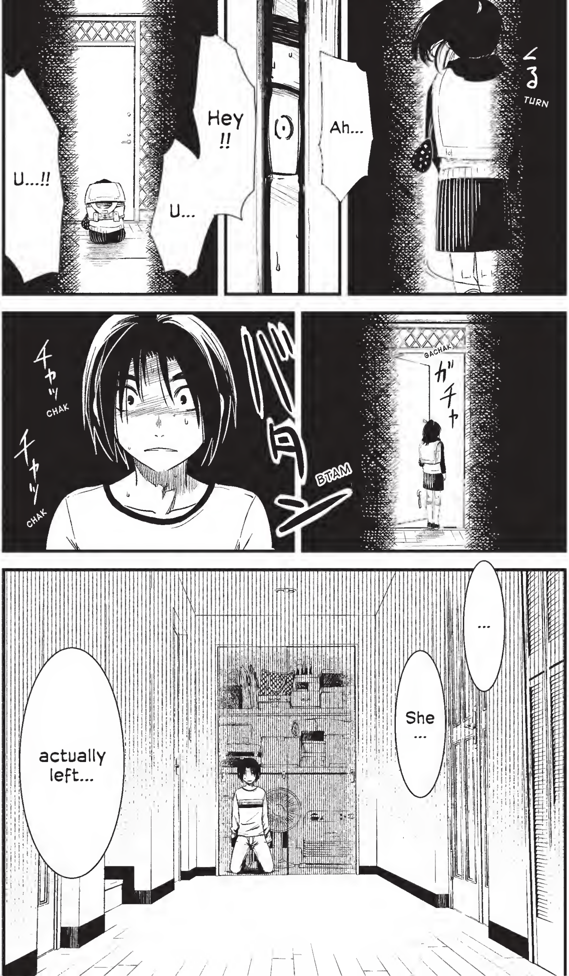

8
I'll be
going now.

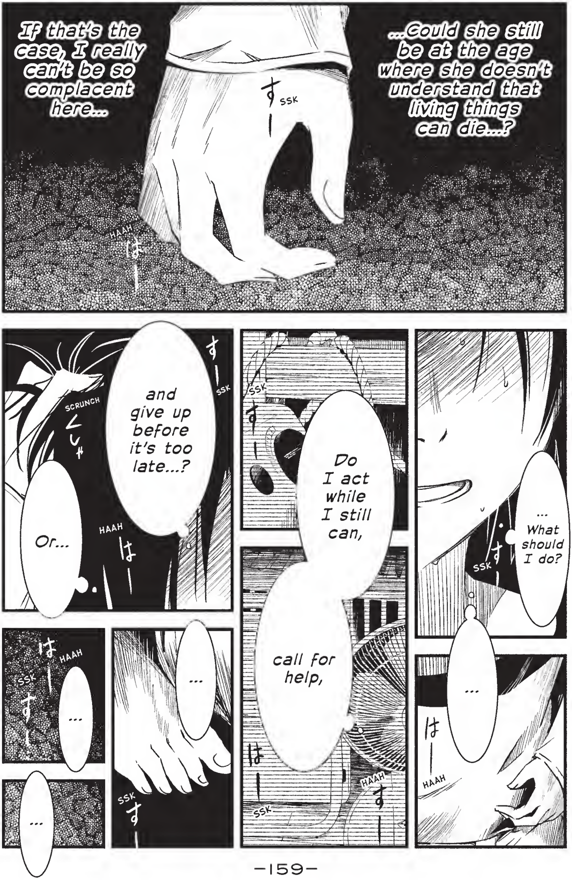

ゴ DUN
ゴ DUN
ゴ DUN
ゴ DUN
I'll be
Wh...
Huh...?!
ゴ DUN
ゴ DUN
going now.
ゴ DUN
You do remember that you have someone locked up in your house, right?!
ゴ DUN
ゴ DUN

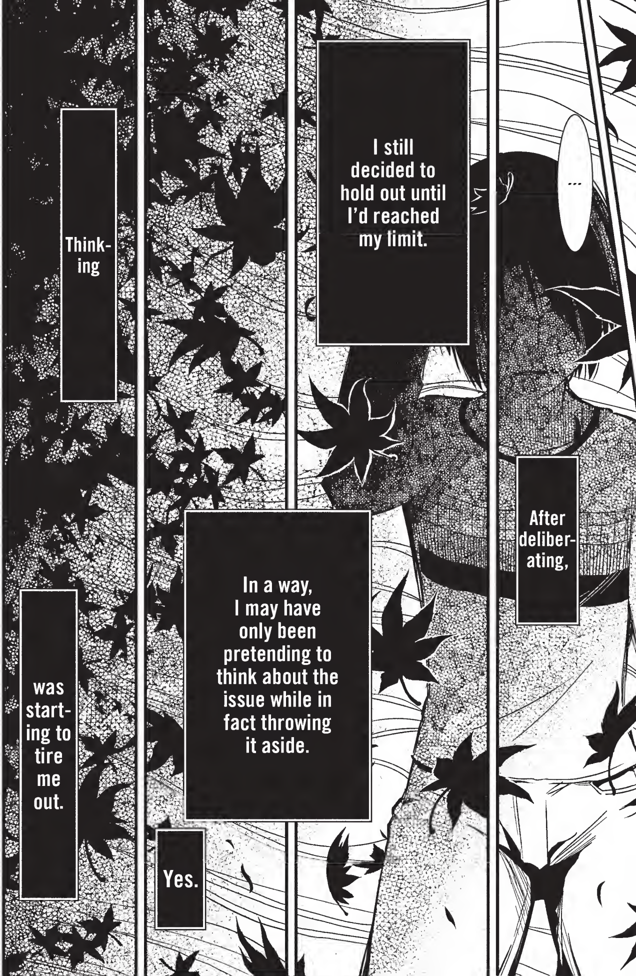

ゴ
DUN
So why are you going to school?
No! No you aren't!
ゴ
DUN
You'll be "going now" ...?
ゴ
DUN
You can't ...
ゴ
DUN
Don't go anywhere ...!!
ゴ
DUN
ゴ
DUN
ゴ
DUN
ゴ
DUN

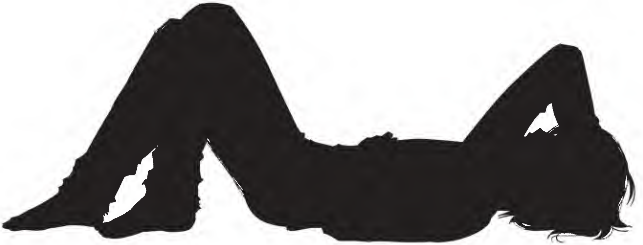

How is she able to go to school in such a situation ...?
STARE...
じ
I don't understand ...!!
Wait ...
Wait !
Please ...
Do you have something to eat ?!
I'm hungry right now...!
Anything, please...!

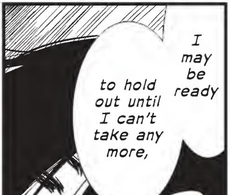

So...
So please ...
...
...
...
MUTTER ぼそ：
... lways ...
...our... ets

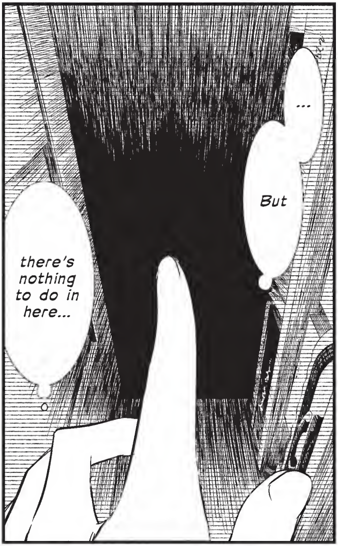

くる
TURN
Ah...
(·)
Hey !!
U...
U...!!
ガチャ
GACHAK
バタン
BTAM
チャッ
CHAK
チャッ
CHAK
...
She ...
actually left...

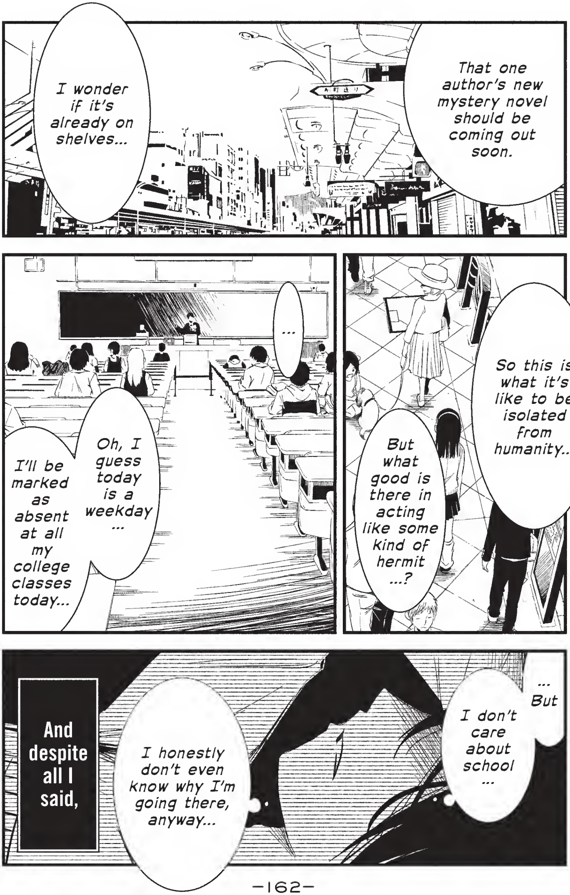

...Could she still be at the age where she doesn't understand that living things can die...?
If that's the case, I really can't be so complacent here...
すー SSK
はー HAAH
...What should I do?
すー SSK
Do I act while I still can,
call for help,
すー SSK
Or...
and give up before it's too late...?
すー SSK
くしゃ SCRUNCH
はー HAAH
...
はー HAAH
はー HAAH
すー SSK
...
すー SSK
...
はー HAAH
すー SSK
...
すー SSK
...

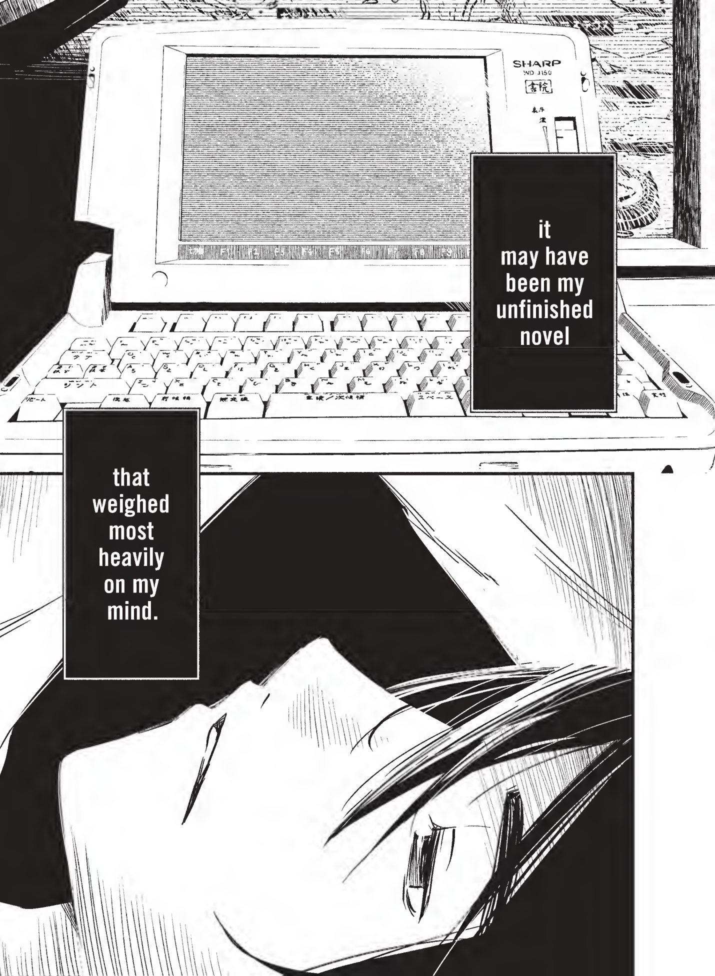

…
After deliberating,
I still decided to hold out until I'd reached my limit.
In a way, I may have only been pretending to think about the issue while in fact throwing it aside.
Yes.
Thinking was starting to tire me out.

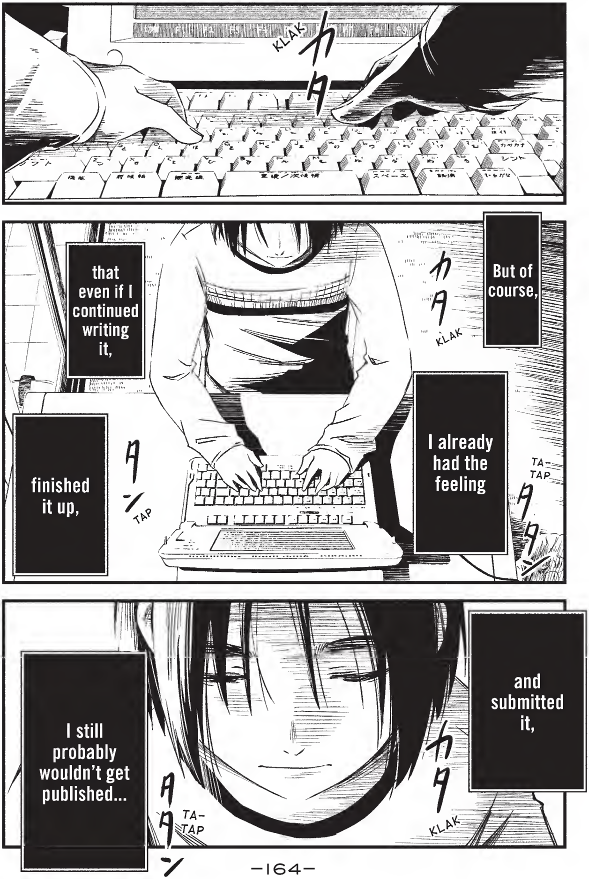


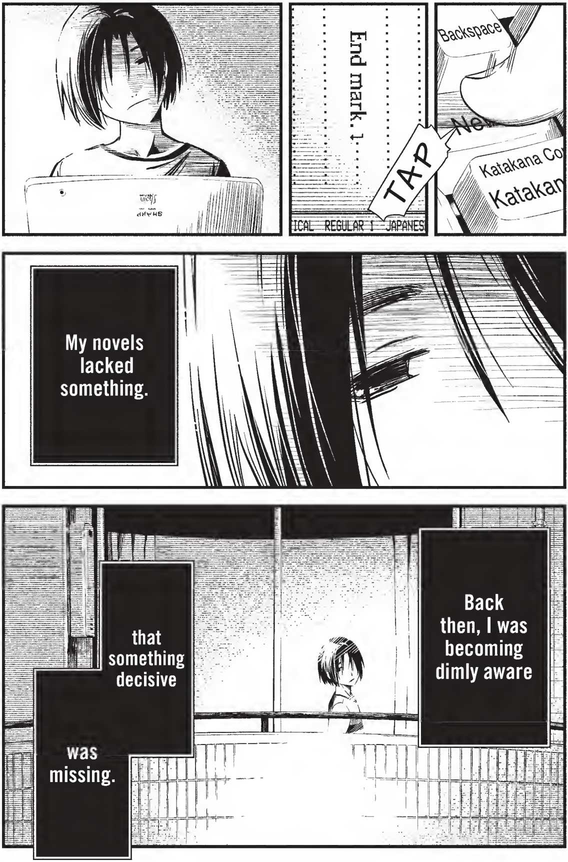

I may be ready to hold out until I can't take any more,

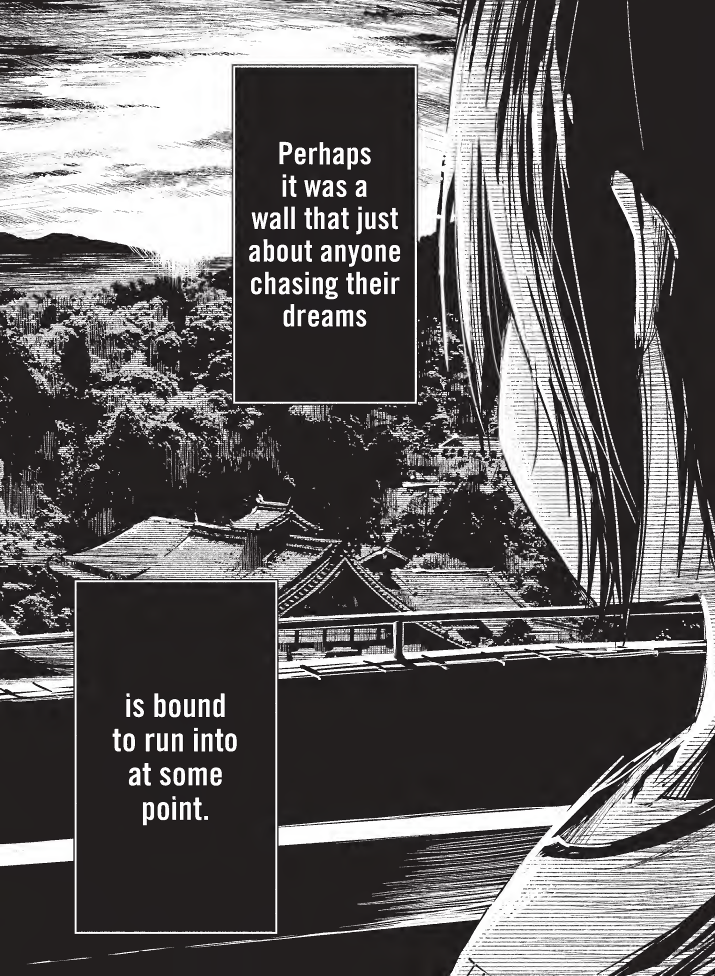

...
But
there's nothing to do in here...

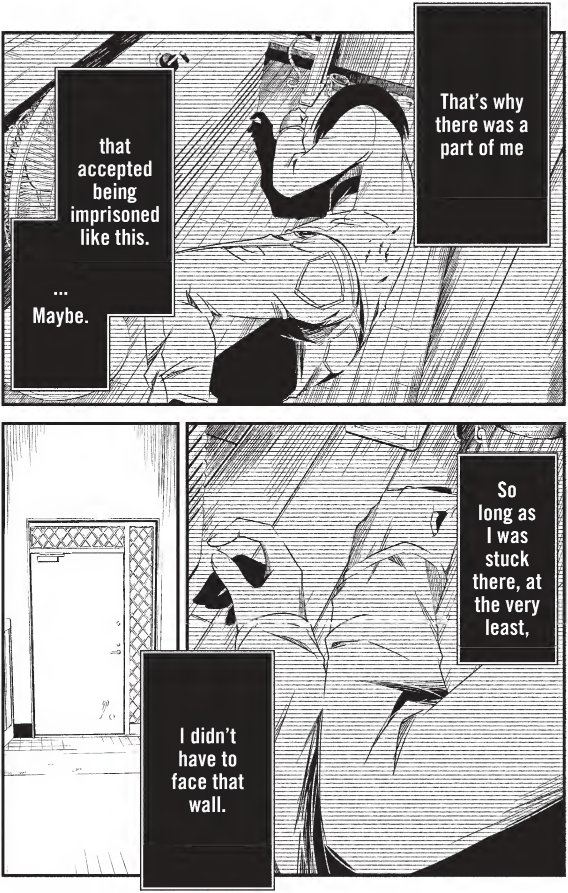

That one author's new mystery novel should be coming out soon.
I wonder if it's already on shelves...
So this is what it's like to be isolated from humanity...
But what good is there in acting like some kind of hermit...?
...
Oh, I guess today is a weekday...
I'll be marked as absent at all my college classes today...
...But I don't care about school...
I honestly don't even know why I'm going there, anyway...
And despite all I said,

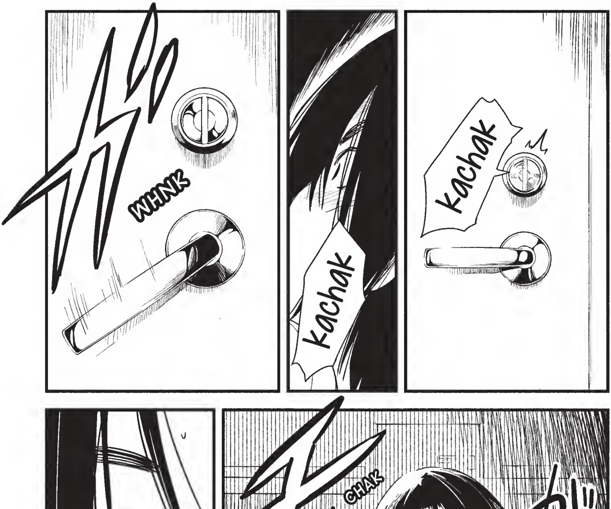

SHARP
書院
it may have been my unfinished novel
that weighed most heavily on my mind.

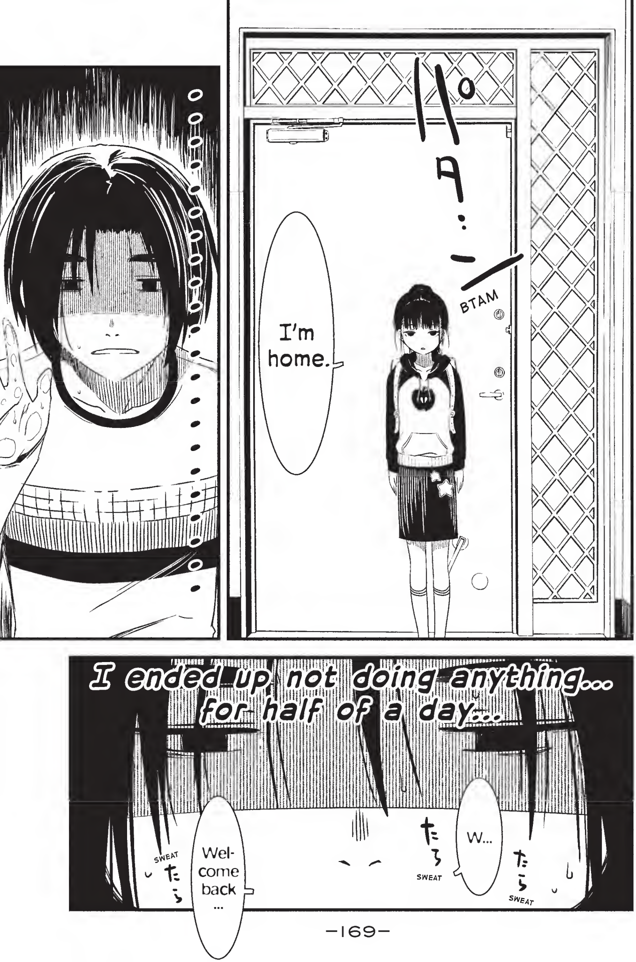

KLAK
But of course,
KLAK
I already had the feeling
TA-TAP
that even if I continued writing it,
finished it up,
TAP
and submitted it,
KLAK
I still probably wouldn't get published...
TA-TAP

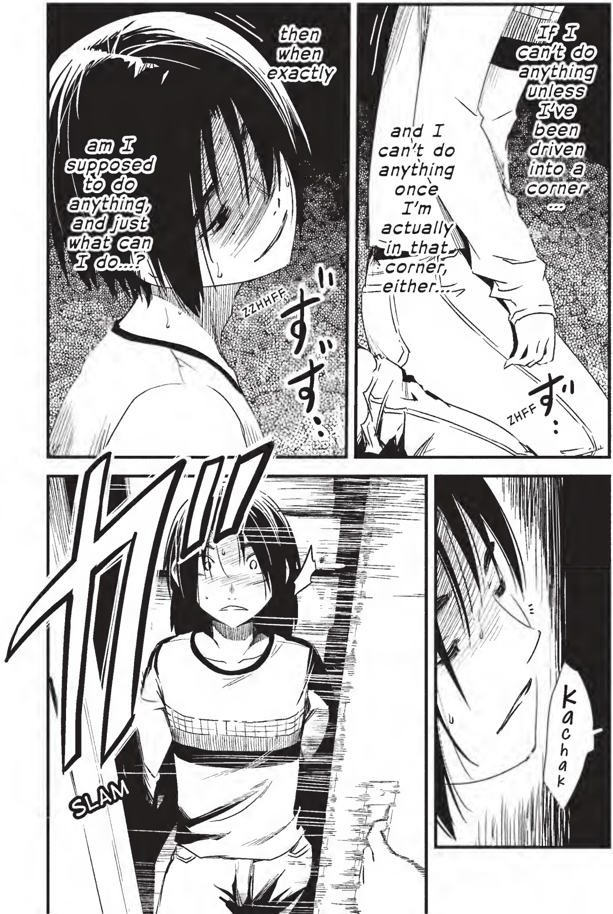

Backspace
Ne
Katakana Co
Katakan
TAP
End mark. ↓
ICAL REGULAR 1 JAPANES
My novels lacked something.
Back then, I was becoming dimly aware
that something decisive
was missing.

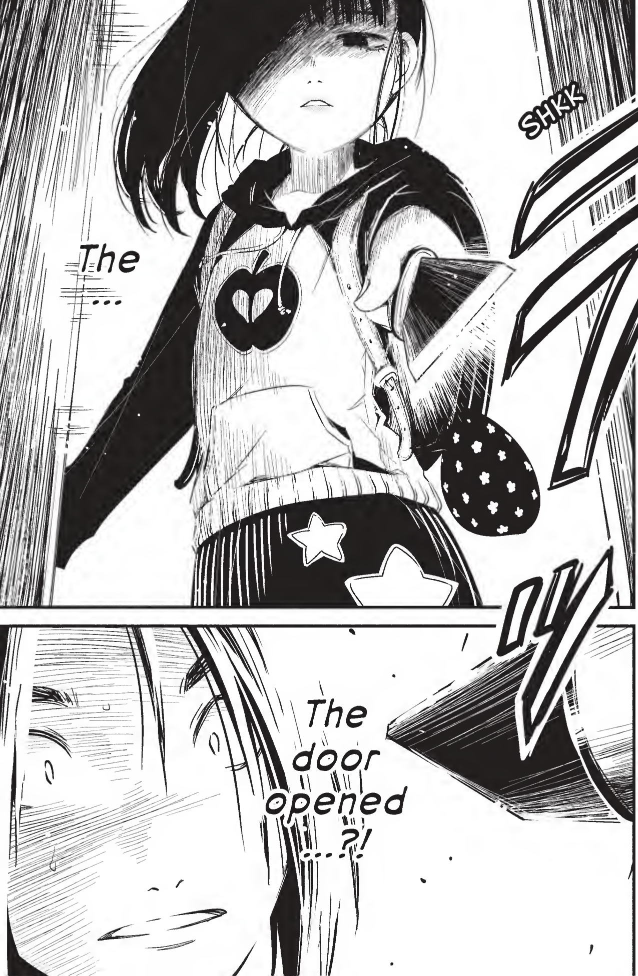

Perhaps it was a wall that just about anyone chasing their dreams
is bound to run into at some point.


That's why there was a part of me
that accepted being imprisoned like this.
... Maybe.
So long as I was stuck there, at the very least,
I didn't have to face that wall.

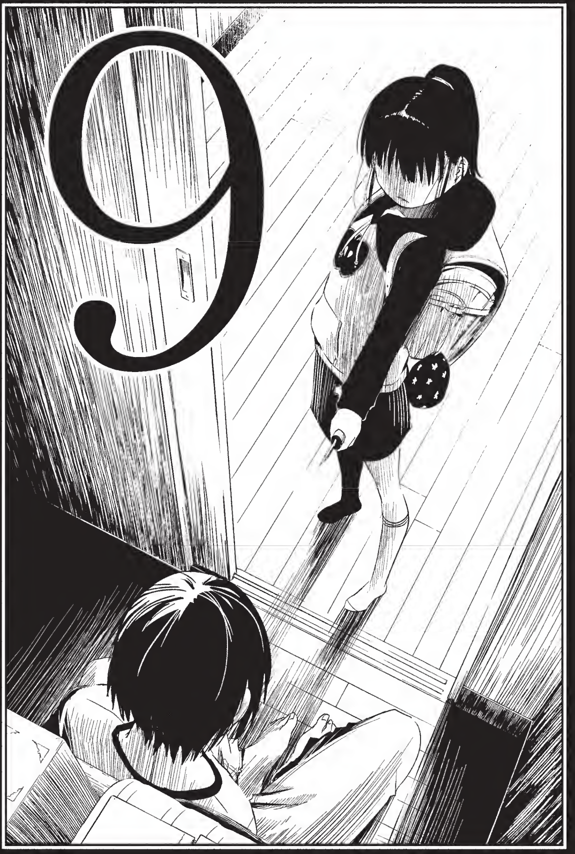

kachak
kachak
WHNK
がば
JUMP
CHAK
...!!
Her parents ...!!

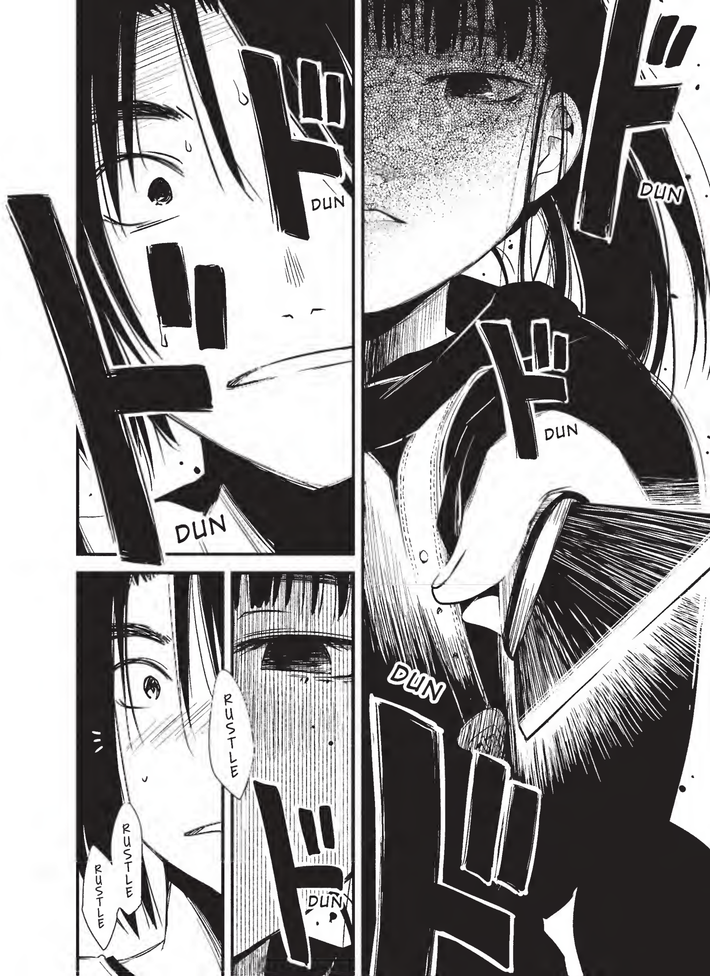

パタ…ン
BTAM
I'm home.
I ended up not doing anything... for half of a day...
たら
SWEAT
W...
たら
SWEAT
Wel-come back ...
たら
SWEAT

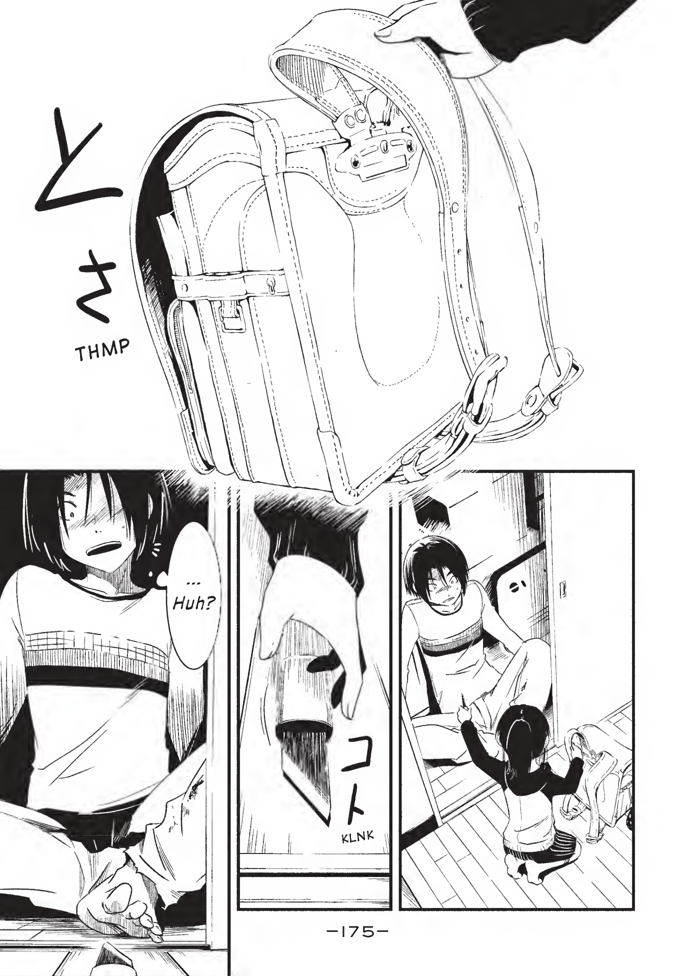

If I can't do anything unless I've been driven into a corner...
and I can't do anything once I'm actually in that corner, either...
ZHFF
ず…
then when exactly
am I supposed to do anything, and just what can I do...?
ZZHHFF
ずず…
Kachak
ガッ
SLAM

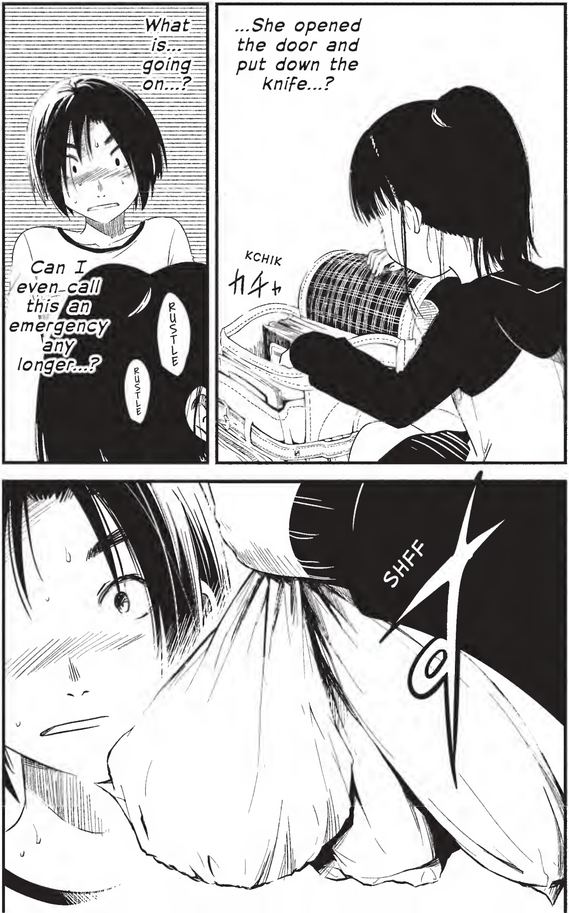

SHKK
The ...
The door opened ...?!

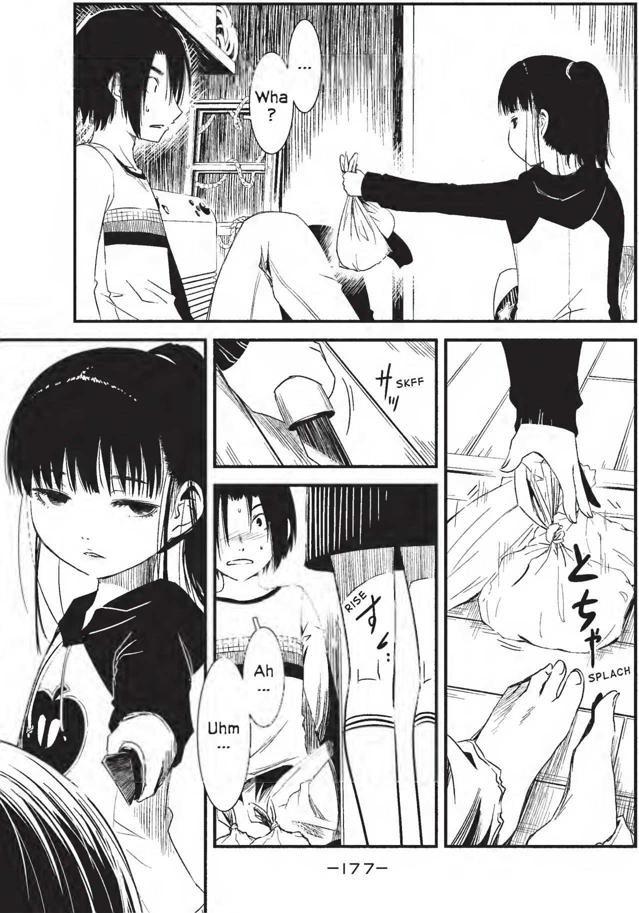
2015.6

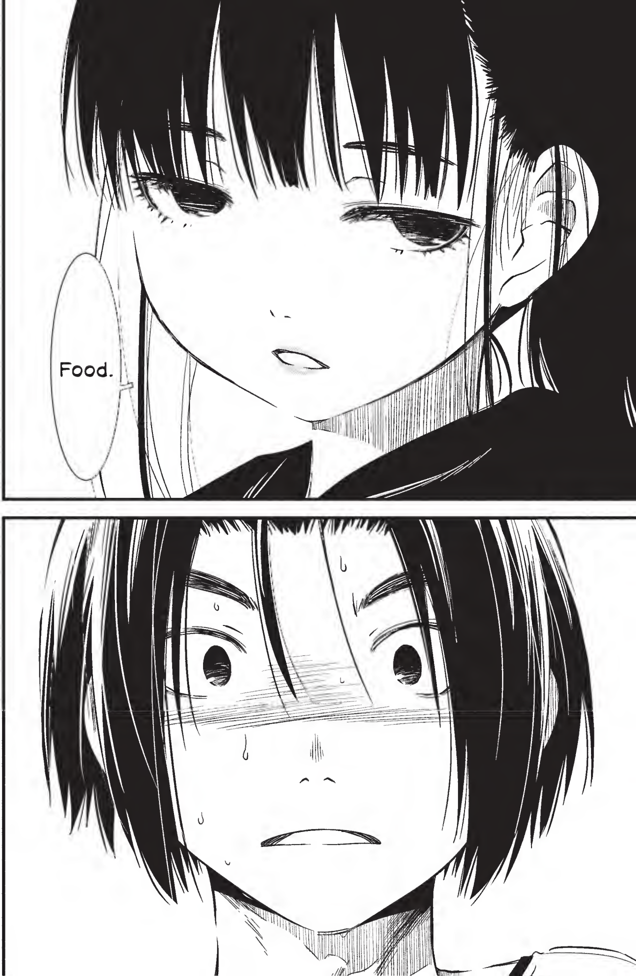

9

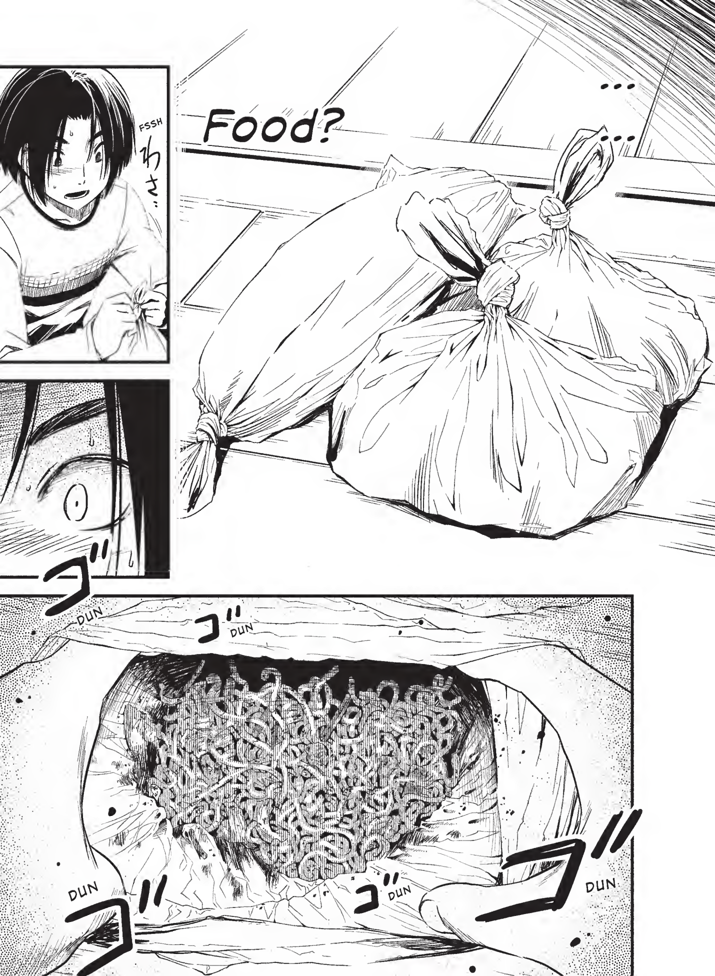

ド
DUN
ド
DUN
DUN
ド
ド
DUN
ド
DUN
RUSTLE
ド
DUN
RUSTLE
RUSTLE

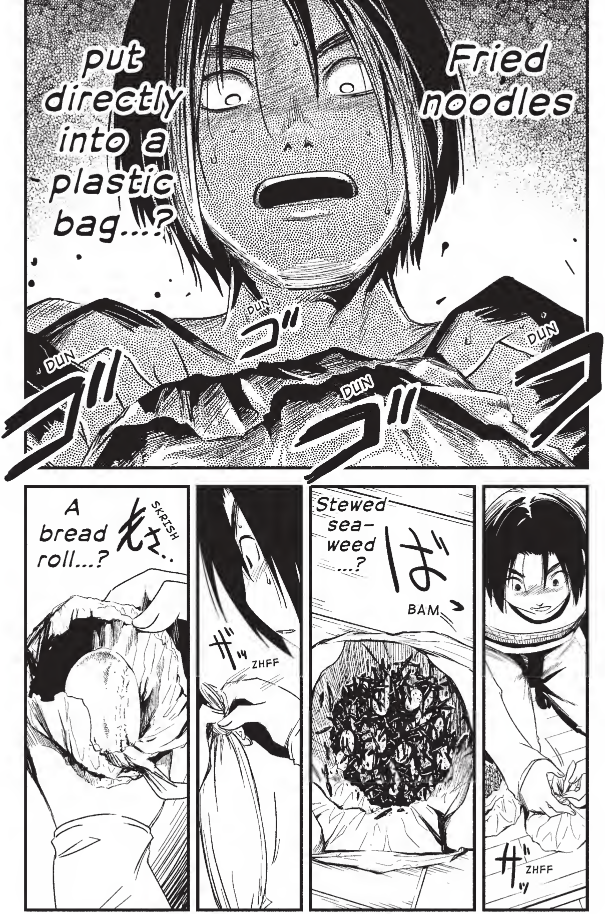

とさ
THMP
コト
KLNK
... Huh?

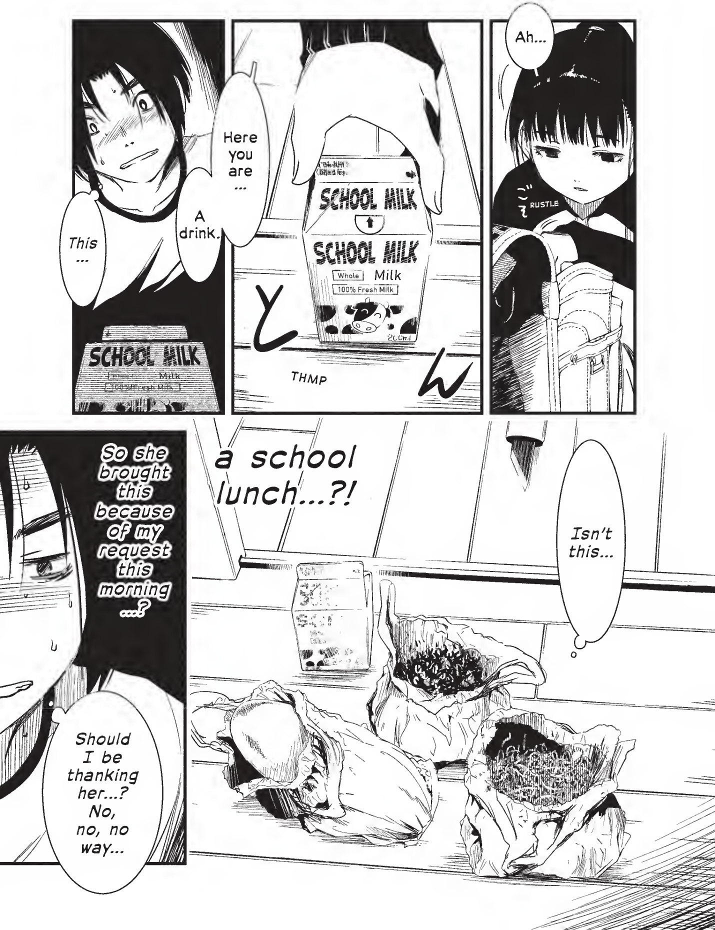

...She opened the door and put down the knife...?
KCHIK
カチャ
What is... going on...?
Can I even call this an emergency any longer...?
RUSTLE
RUSTLE
SHFF

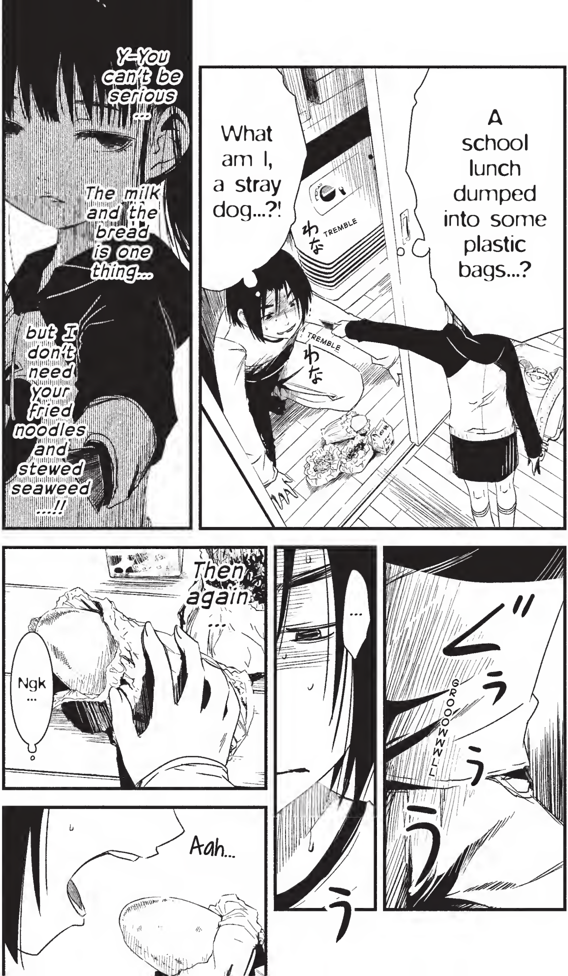

...
Wha ?
とちゃ
SPLACH
ザッ
SKFF
すく…
RISE
Ah ...
Uhm ...

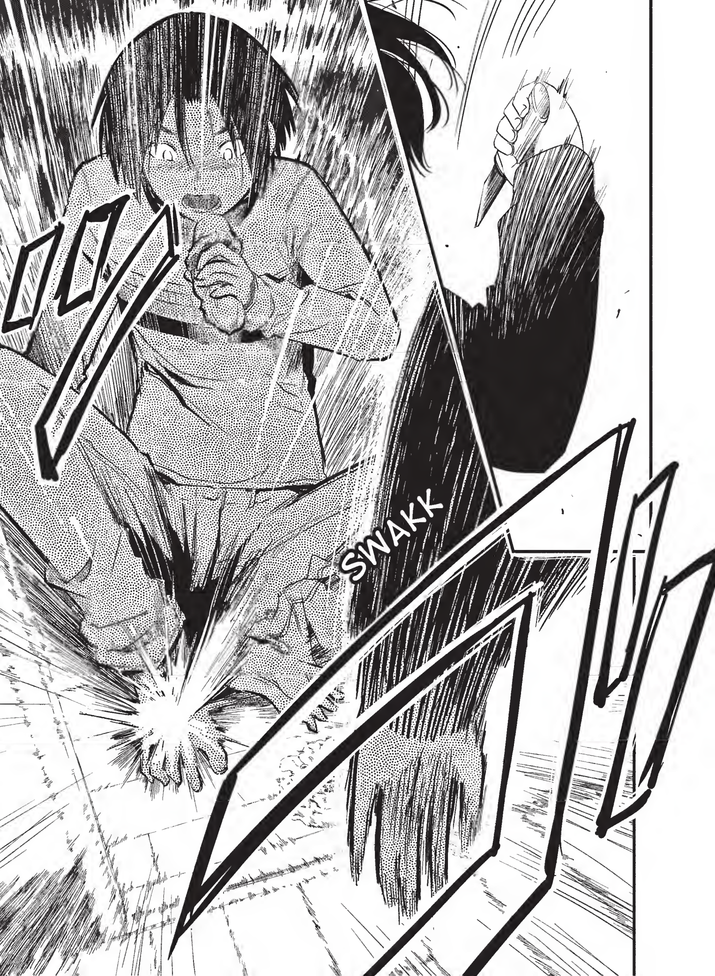

Food.

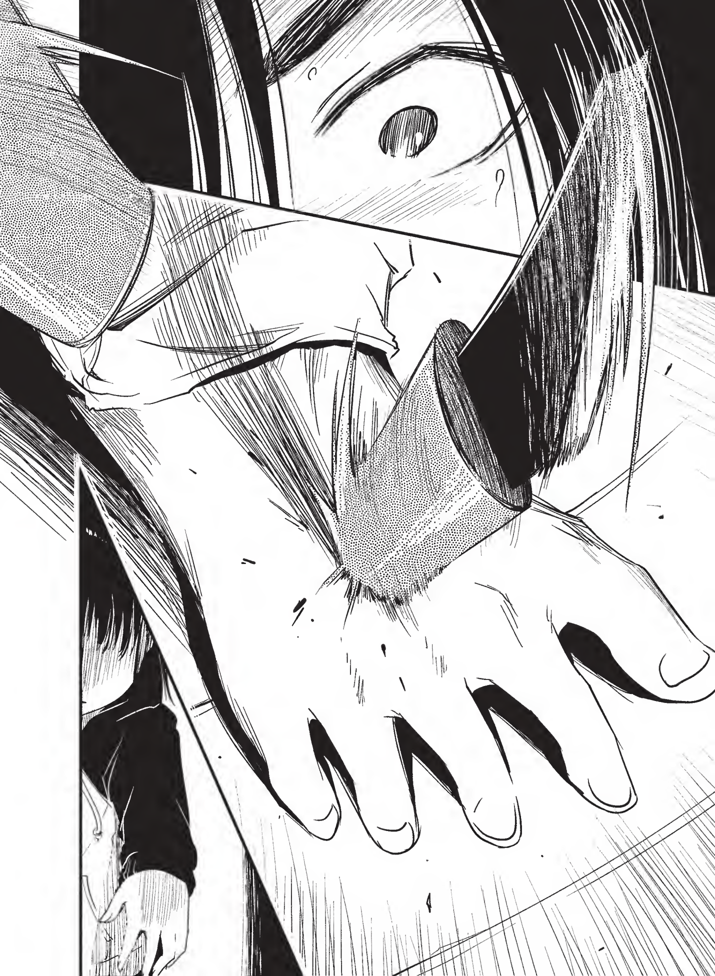

...
...
Food?
わさ
FSSH
ゴ
DUN
ゴ
DUN
ゴ
DUN
ゴ
DUN
ゴ
DUN


Fried noodles
put directly into a plastic bag...?
ゴ DUN
ゴ DUN
ゴ DUN
ゴ DUN
ザッ ZHFF
Stewed sea-weed ...?
ば BAM
ザッ ZHFF
A bread roll...?
もさ SKRISH

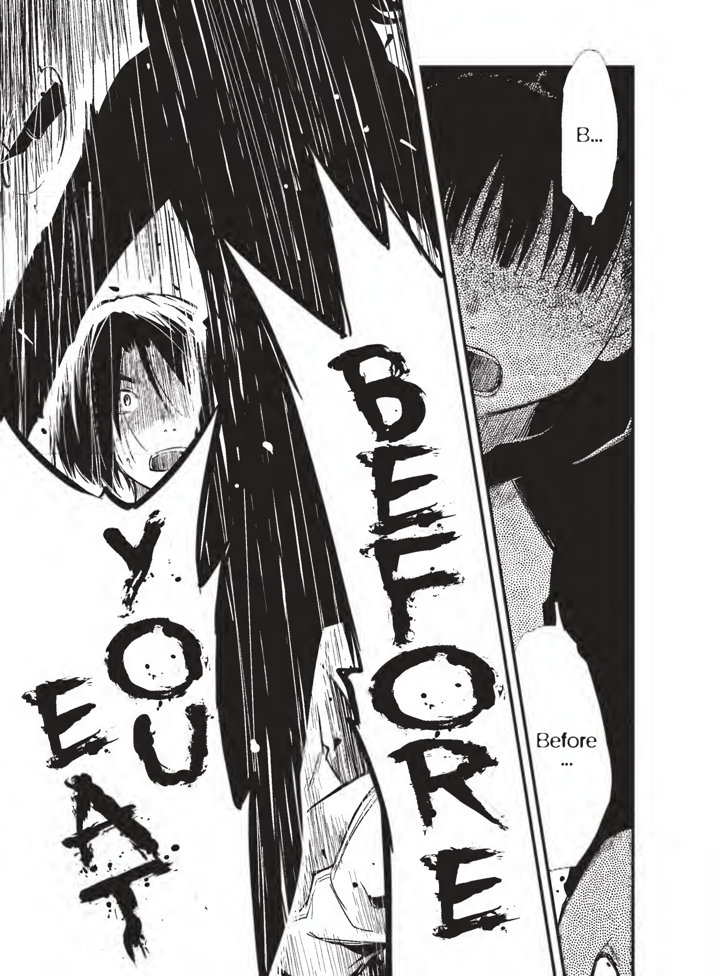

Ah...
RUSTLE
Here you are...
A drink.
SCHOOL MILK
SCHOOL MILK
Whole Milk
100% Fresh Milk
THMP
This...
SCHOOL MILK
Isn't this...
a school lunch...?!
So she brought this because of my request this morning...?
Should I be thanking her...? No, no, no way...

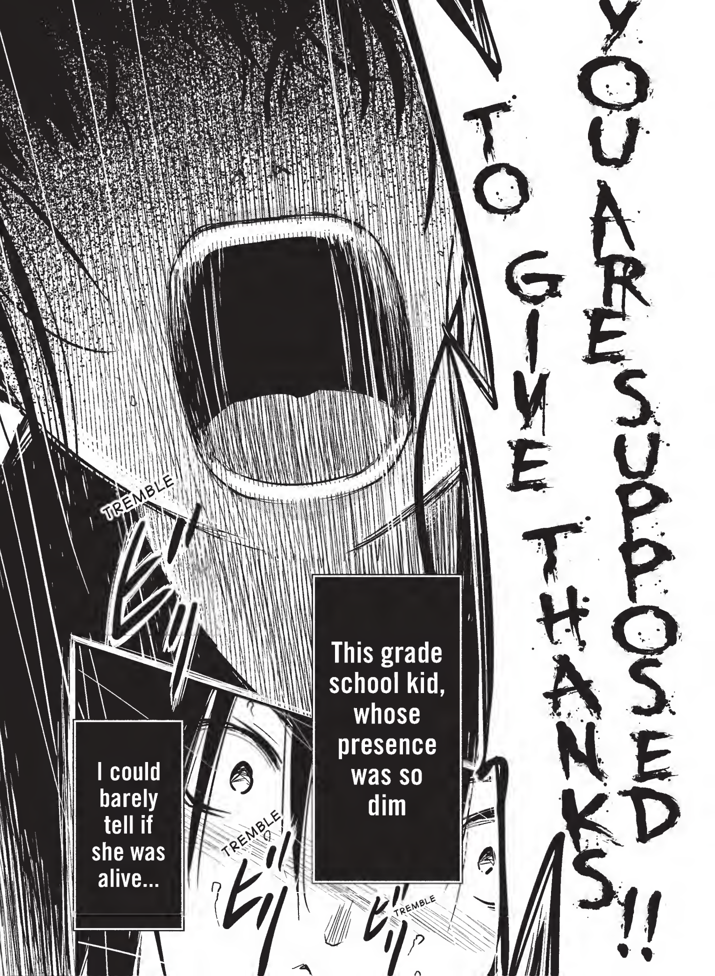

A school lunch dumped into some plastic bags...?
What am I, a stray dog...?!
わな TREMBLE
わな TREMBLE
Y-You can't be serious...
The milk and the bread is one thing...
but I don't need your fried noodles and stewed seaweed...!!
ぐうううう
GROOOWWLL
...
Then again...
Ngk...
Aah...

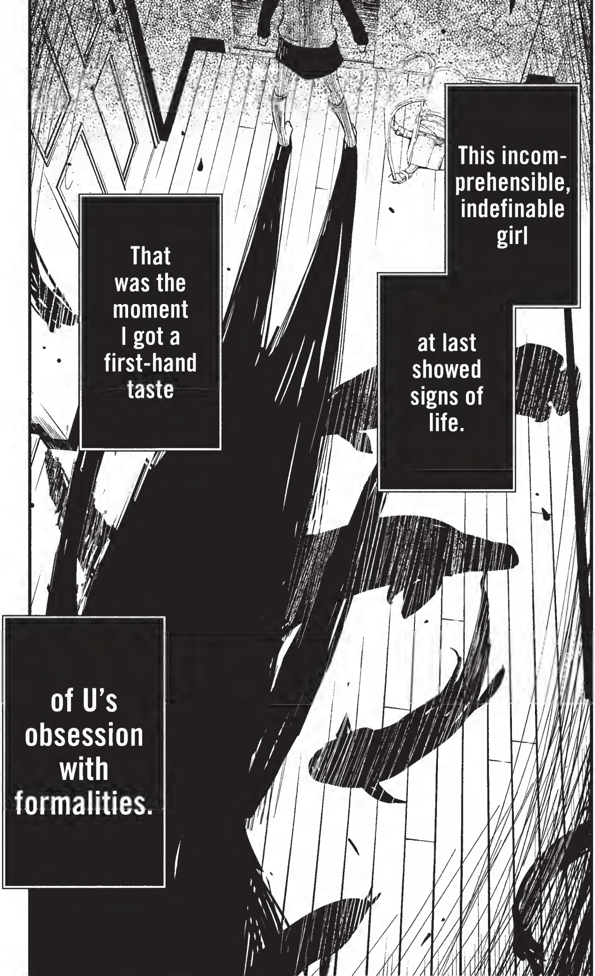

SWAKK

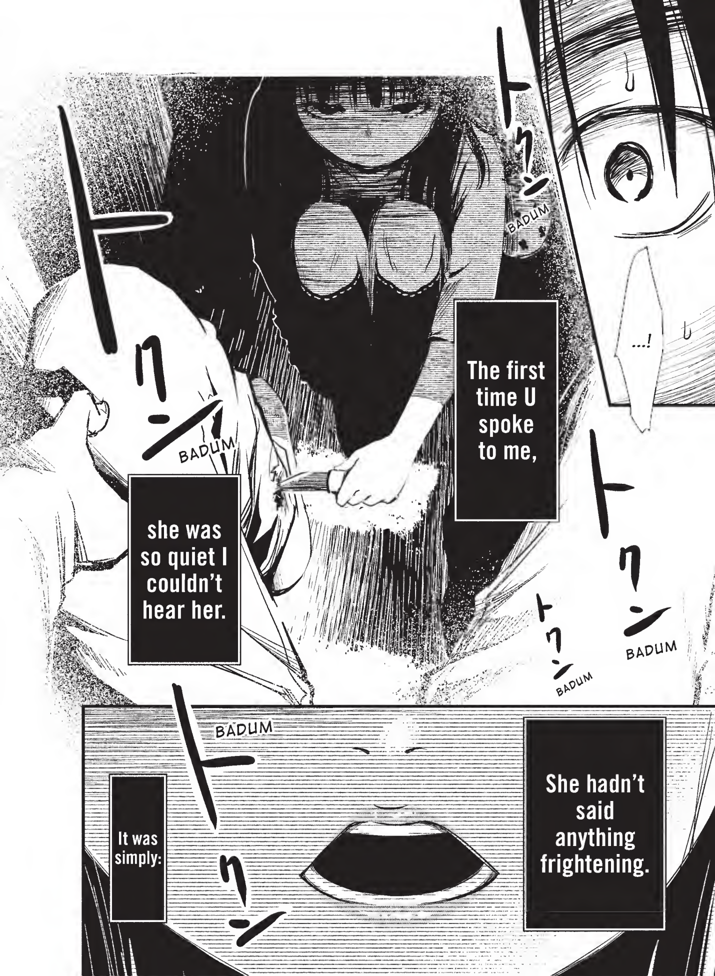


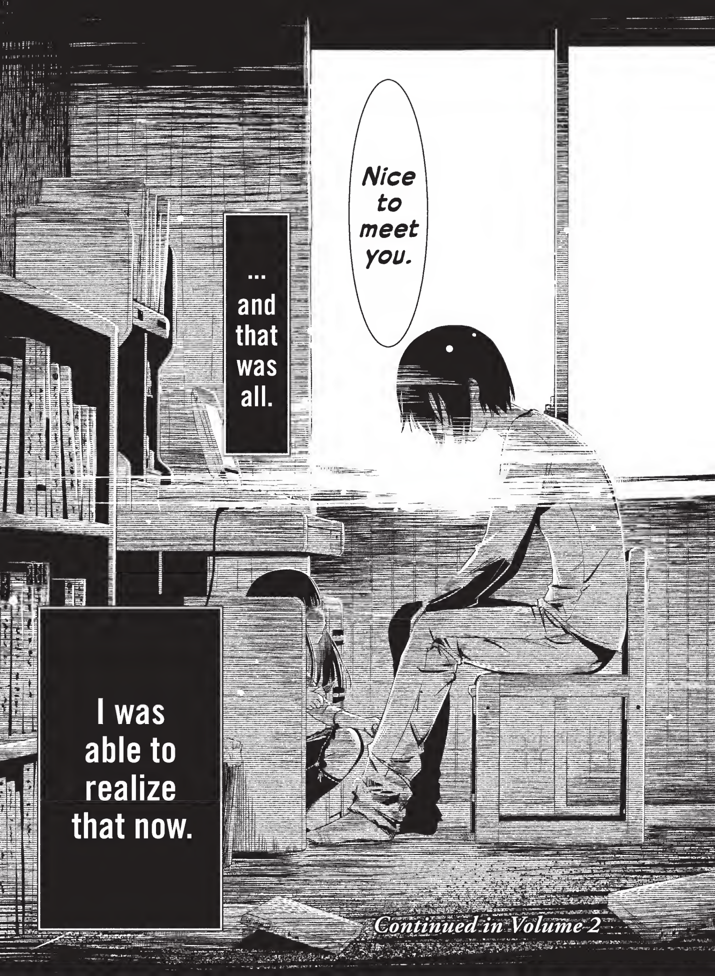
AHA....


B...
Before ...
BEFORE
YOU EAT


YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO GIVE THANKS!!
TREMBLE
This grade school kid, whose presence was so dim
I could barely tell if she was alive...
TREMBLE
TREMBLE

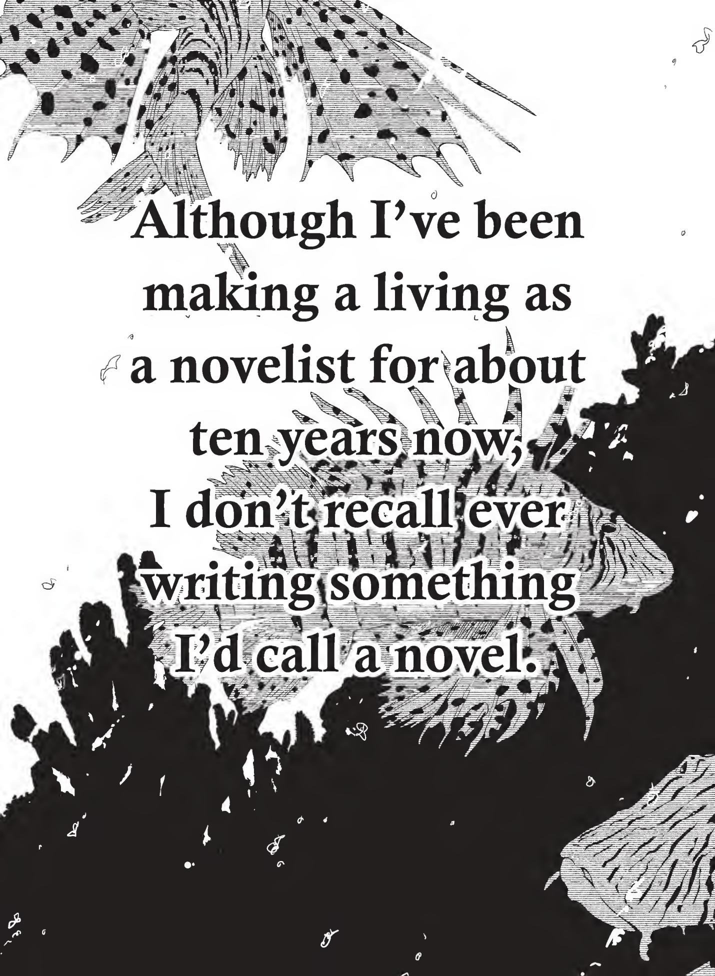

This incomprehensible, indefinable girl
at last showed signs of life.
That was the moment I got a first-hand taste
of U's obsession with formalities.


トクン BADUM
…!
The first time U spoke to me,
トクン BADUM
トクン BADUM
she was so quiet I couldn't hear her.
トクン BADUM
She hadn't said anything frightening.
トクン BADUM
It was simply:


... and that was all.
Nice to meet you.
I was able to realize that now.

Continued in Volume 2

“My mom and dad are gone.”
A messy living room,
a dry sink, an empty refrigerator.
The young man escapes from the closet
and learns the truth about U as their
imperfect relationship begins to change.
Imperfect Girl 2
Coming This Winter



Although I've been
making a living as
a novelist for about
ten years now,
I don't recall ever
writing something
I'd call a novel.

Imperfect Girl 1

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